無限の住人

HIROAKI SAMURA

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

Cry of the Worm

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Cry of the Worm

publisher
Mike Richardson

series editor
Dave Chipps

collection editor
Suzanne Taylor

collection designers
Harald Graham & Amy Arendts

art director
Mark Cox

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL VOL. 2: CRY OF THE WORM
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story
HIROAKI SAMURA

translation
Dana Lewis & Toren Smith

lettering and retouch
Wayne Truman & Tomoko Saito

Cry of the Worm

DARK HORSE MANGA™

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Swastika

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su*—"well" + *asti*—"he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America, and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The sauvastika generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The swastika, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782–83). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

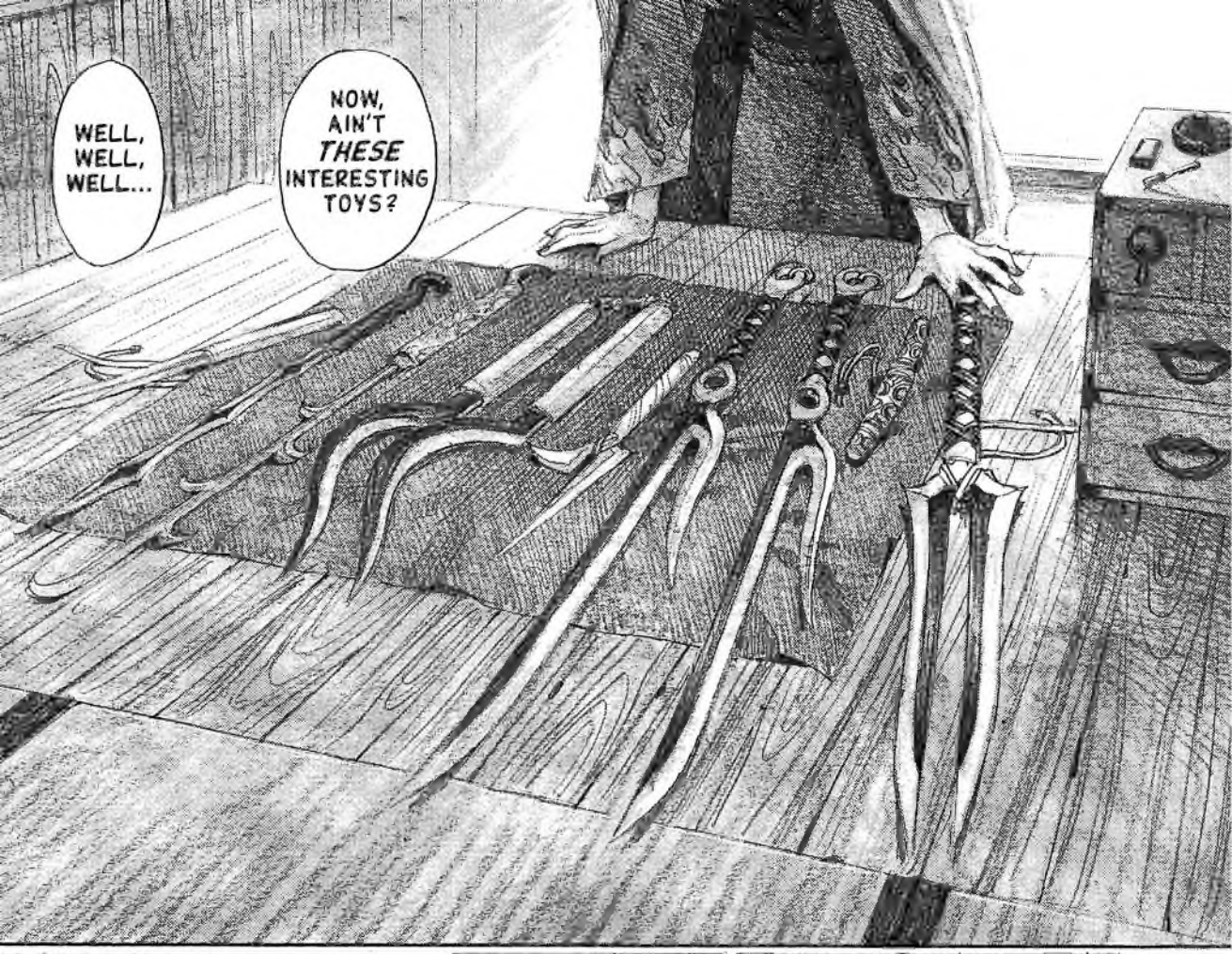
The Artwork

The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue

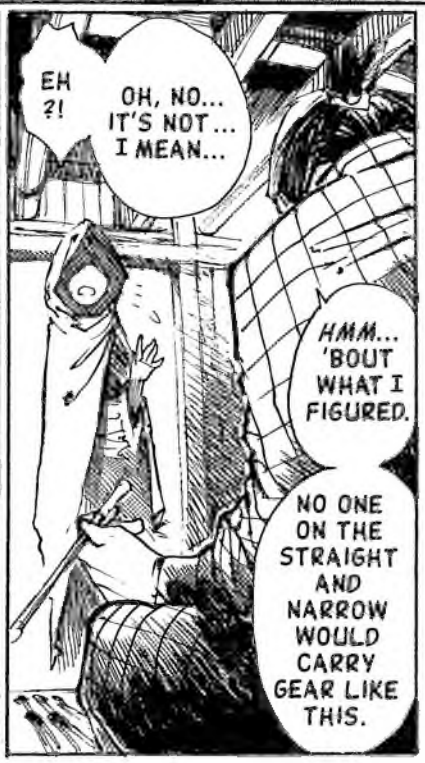
Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this horror-fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

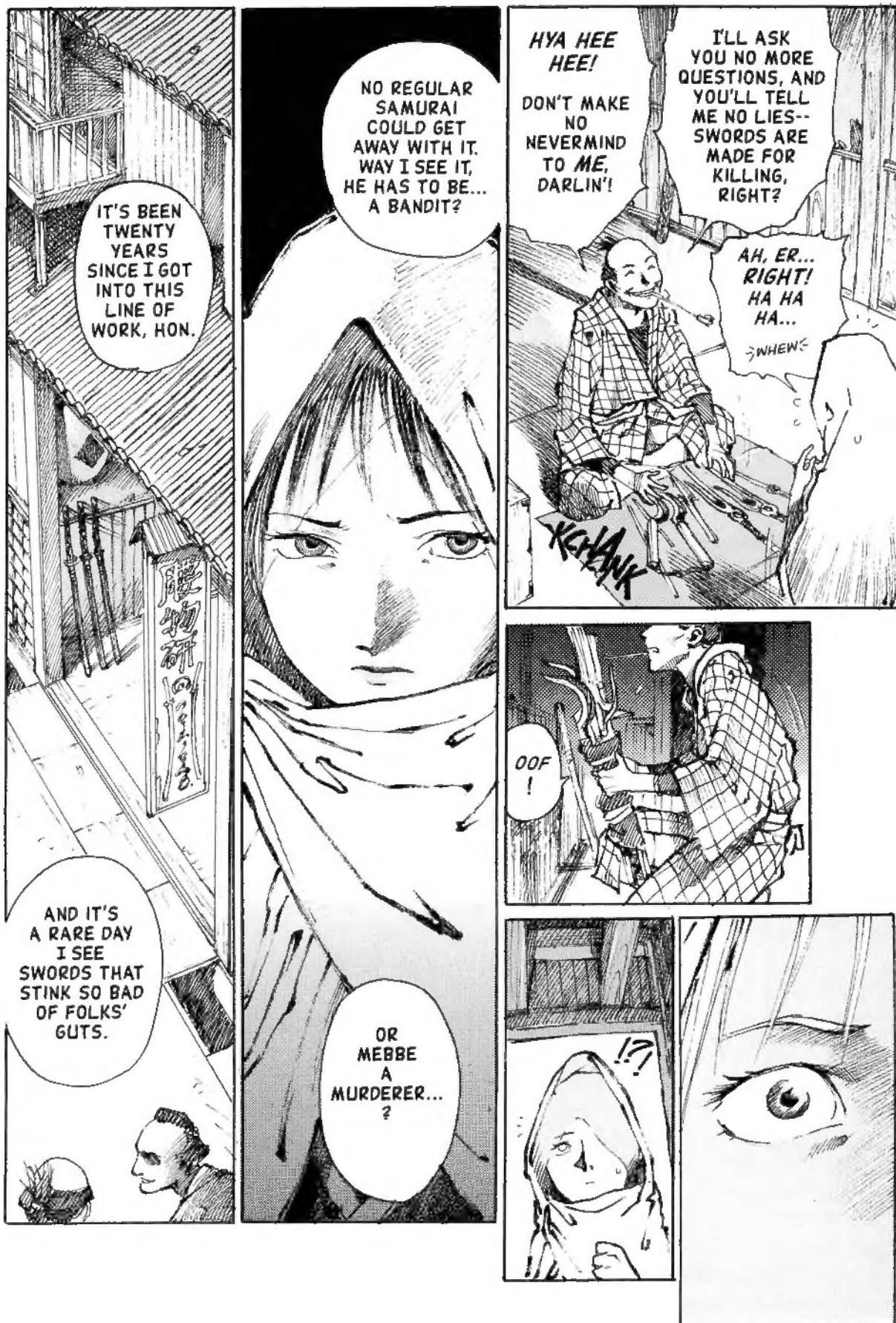
FANATIC

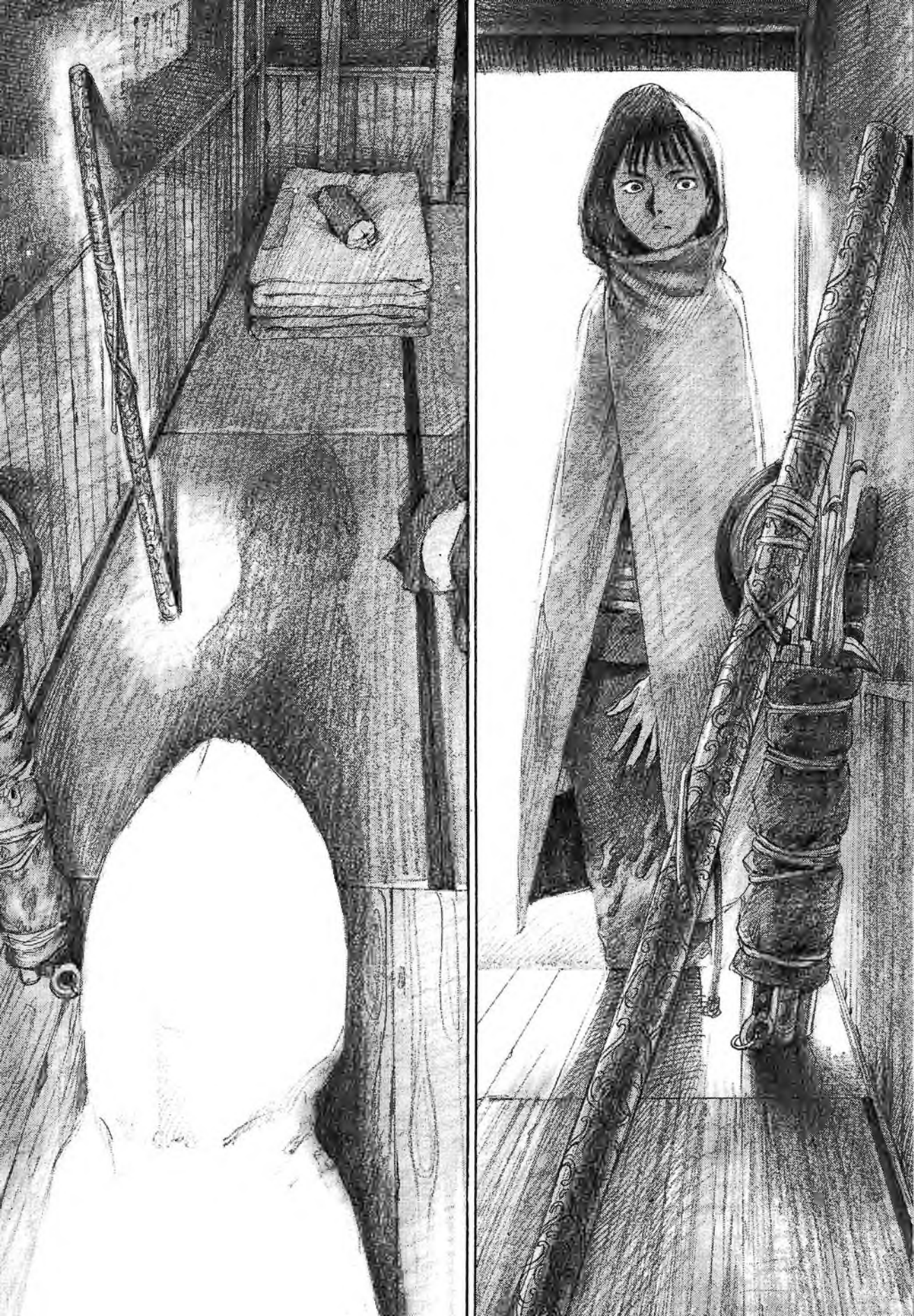

WELL, WELL, WELL...
NOW, AIN'T *THESE* INTERESTING TOYS?

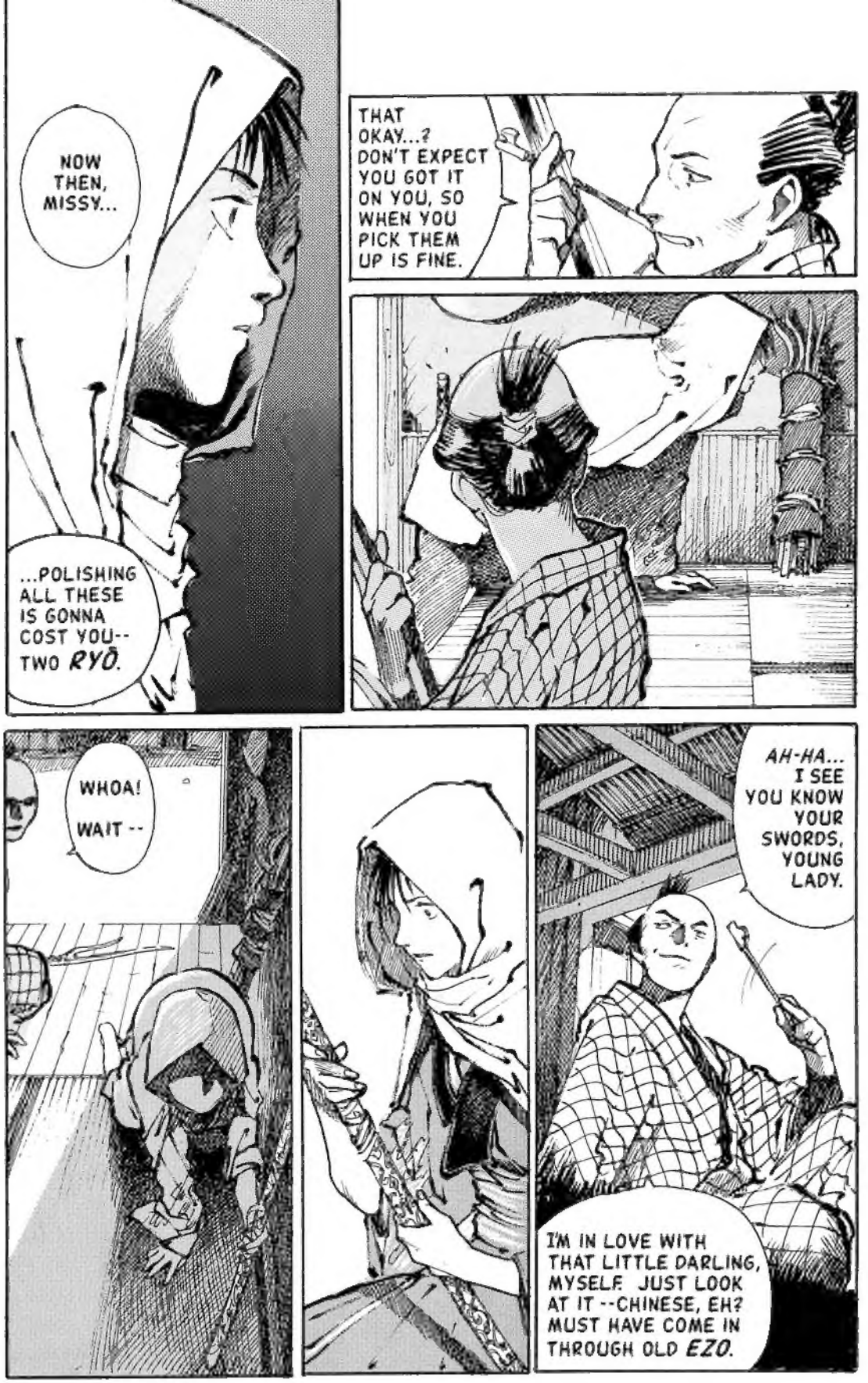
WE ONLY HAVE TWO DAYS, SO...
DON'T WORRY YOURSELF, DARLIN'. I DON'T CALL MYSELF A SWORD POLISHER FOR NOTHIN'.

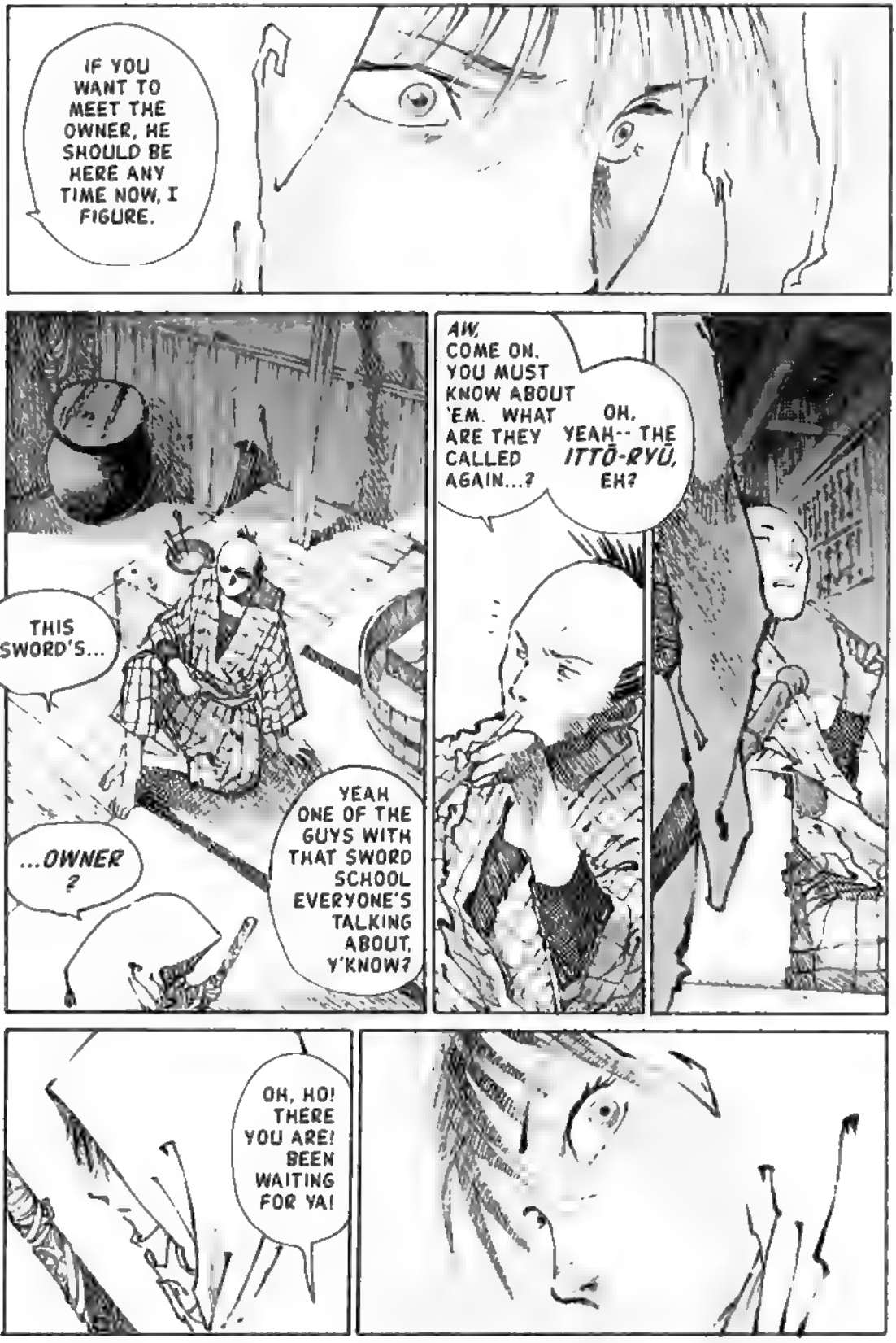
JUST ONE QUESTION, THOUGH...WHO DO THESE *REALLY* BELONG TO?
YOUR DAD? YOUR HUSBAND?


EH ?!
OH, NO... IT'S NOT... I MEAN...
HMM... 'BOUT WHAT I FIGURED.
NO ONE ON THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW WOULD CARRY GEAR LIKE THIS.


IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS SINCE I GOT INTO THIS LINE OF WORK, HON.
AND IT'S A RARE DAY I SEE SWORDS THAT STINK SO BAD OF FOLKS' GUTS.
NO REGULAR SAMURAI COULD GET AWAY WITH IT. WAY I SEE IT, HE HAS TO BE... A BANDIT?
OR MEBBE A MURDERER...?
HYA HEE HEE!
DON'T MAKE NO NEVERMIND TO ME, DARLIN'!
I'LL ASK YOU NO MORE QUESTIONS, AND YOU'LL TELL ME NO LIES-- SWORDS ARE MADE FOR KILLING, RIGHT?
AH, ER... RIGHT! HA HA HA...
WHEW
KCHANK
OOF!
!?!




NOW THEN, MISSY...
...POLISHING ALL THESE IS GONNA COST YOU-- TWO RYŌ.
THAT OKAY...? DON'T EXPECT YOU GOT IT ON YOU, SO WHEN YOU PICK THEM UP IS FINE.
WHOA! WAIT --
AH-HA... I SEE YOU KNOW YOUR SWORDS, YOUNG LADY.
I'M IN LOVE WITH THAT LITTLE DARLING, MYSELF. JUST LOOK AT IT --CHINESE, EH? MUST HAVE COME IN THROUGH OLD EZO.


IF YOU WANT TO MEET THE OWNER, HE SHOULD BE HERE ANY TIME NOW, I FIGURE.
THIS SWORD'S...
...OWNER ?
YEAH ONE OF THE GUYS WITH THAT SWORD SCHOOL EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT, Y'KNOW?
AW, COME ON. YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT 'EM. WHAT ARE THEY CALLED AGAIN...?
OH, YEAH-- THE ITTŌ-RYŪ, EH?
OH, HO! THERE YOU ARE! BEEN WAITING FOR YA!

WOMAN !
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING ?

SILLY THING WAS TAKEN BY THIS BLADE OF YOURS SIR! HA HA
I SEE
VERY WELL, THEN

EXCELLENT WORK. CHINESE SWORDS ARE FINE WEAPONS, BUT THEY DON'T BEHAVE LIKE JAPANESE SWORDS.
THEY'RE TOO MUCH FOR MOST PEOPLE TO HANDLE. OF COURSE, THAT'S ALSO WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THEM...
THANK YOU, SIR. A SWORD POLISHER PUTS IT ON THE LINE WHEN HE GETS A MASTERPIECE LIKE THAT TO WORK ON. I WAS SWEATING BLOOD, AND NO MISTAKE
BUT SWEAT JUST MAKES THE COOL OF THE EVENING ALL THE MORE PLEASANT, EH?
YOU'RE A MAN WHO KNOWS HOW TO LIVE.
I'LL WORK WITH YOU AGAIN SOMEDAY.
I LOOK FORWARD TO IT, SIR!
NOW, YOUNG LADY... AS I WAS SAYIN'-- HUH?!

SAMURAI !
SIR!!
I, I... THAT...
?
PLEASE SELL ME THAT SWORD !!

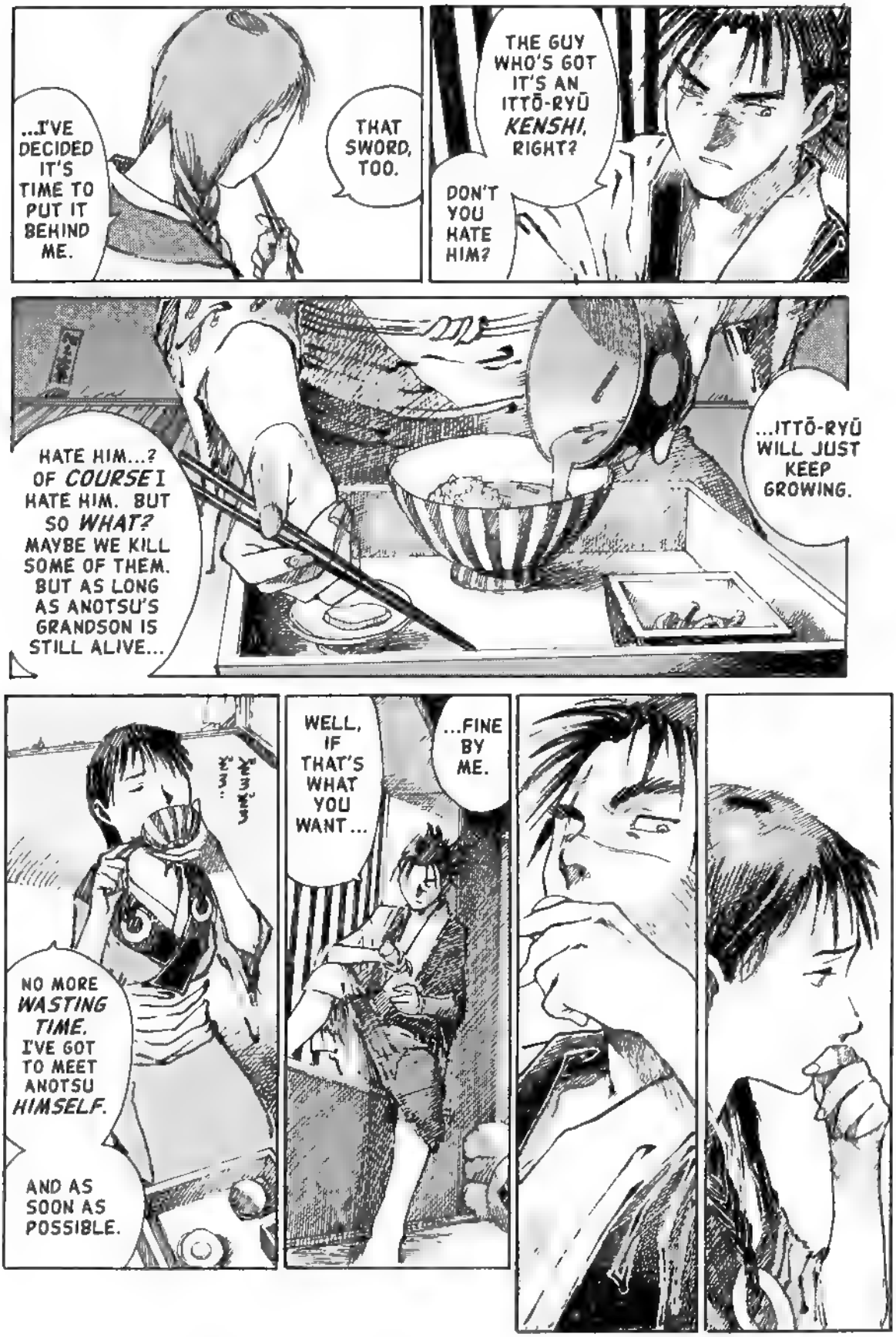
I'LL PAY... I CAN PAY...
...THIRTY RYŌ!
PLEASE, SIR! I BEG YOU!
I'M NOT A SAMURAI.
I'M JUST A KENSHI.
YOUNG WOMAN.
HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF A DŌJŌ THAT USED TO BE IN THE HONSHO DISTRICT... THE ASANO DŌJŌ?
!!
Y... YES...

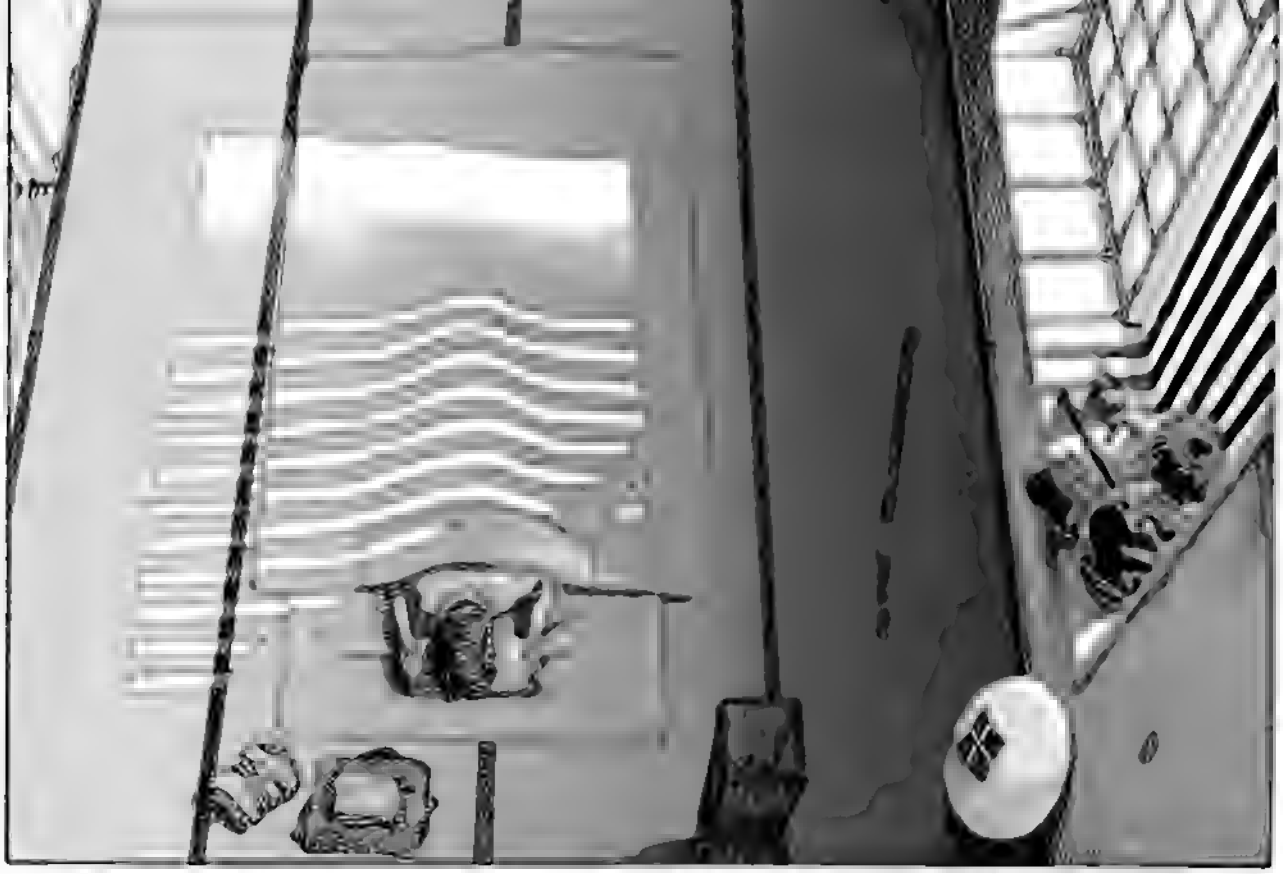
WE'VE BEEN SEARCHING HIGH AND LOW FOR THE ONLY DAUGHTER OF THE HEAD OF THAT DÔJÔ. SHE'S GONE MISSING.
I WON'T SELL THIS SWORD, NOT FOR ALL THE MONEY YOU CAN OFFER.
I CAN'T TELL YOU WHERE I GOT IT, BUT IT'S A KIND OF.. TROPHY OF WAR.
BUT, IF YOU CAN TELL ME WHERE TO FIND THAT GIRL... IF YOU CAN DO *THAT* ...
...THEN I JUST MIGHT CONSIDER SELLING IT.
WELL ?

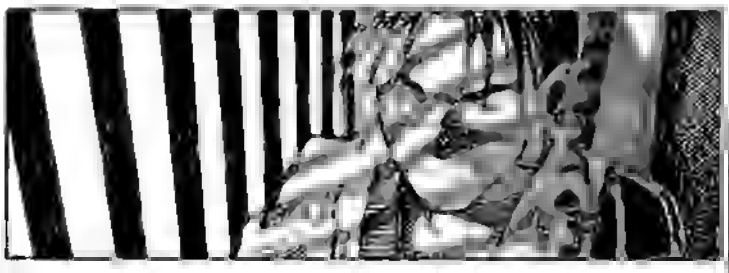
RIN... HAVE YOU GOT ANY IDEA...
...HOW MUCH MONEY THIRTY RYŌ IS?
HEY, I CAN TAKE BEING BROKE. I'M USED TO IT.
BUT YOU-- IF WE DIDN'T HAVE A COIN TO OUR NAME, COULD YOU HANDLE AN EMPTY STOMACH, NEVER TAKING A BATH, ALL THAT CRAP?
I...I'M SORRY, MANJI.
WELL, HELL... YOU DIDN'T BLOW IT, AFTER ALL. AND IT'S YOUR MONEY, ANYWAY. BUT TELL ME...
...WHY THE HELL DID YOU SUDDENLY WANT SOMEONE ELSE'S SWORD?
IT'S NOT "SOMEONE ELSE'S SWORD."

THAT SWORD... IT...
...IT BELONGED TO MY *FATHER.*
TWO YEARS AGO, AFTER FATHER WAS KILLED...ALL THE SWORDS IN THE DŌJŌ WERE STOLEN.
THAT SWORD WAS ONE OF THEM.
ORIGINALLY IT WAS GRANDFATHER'S THEY TOLD ME THAT WHEN GRANDPA TAKAYUKI WAS STILL HEAD OF THE DŌJŌ, HE HAD IT ON DISPLAY. IT WAS HIS SPECIAL TREASURE.
I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT WAS SO *WEIRD.* OUR *MUTENICHI-RYŪ* SCHOOL WAS SO STRICT ABOUT FORM, BUT GRANDPA'S TREASURE WAS A FOREIGN SWORD!
MAYBE IT WAS A GESTURE... HIS WAY OF SHOWING RESPECT TO ANOTSU SABURO.
....
....

I'M ALREADY *SIXTEEN!* I'VE GOT TO GROW UP.
I CAN'T KEEP TALKING ABOUT MY MOTHER AND FATHER...IT'S *PATHETIC...*
...MANJI, I'M SORRY.
THIS IS THE LAST TIME I'LL TALK LIKE THIS.
AND SO... WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO DO?
DID YOU ASK WHERE THIS GUY'S STAYING? IF YOU WANT TO TAKE IT BACK BY FORCE, I'M WILLING TO HELP.
HE SAID HE'D BE STAYING AT AN INN NEAR ASAKUSA, THE "TAKIGUCHI." HE'LL BE THERE UNTIL TOMORROW, BUT...


...I'VE DECIDED IT'S TIME TO PUT IT BEHIND ME.
THAT SWORD, TOO.
THE GUY WHO'S GOT IT'S AN ITTŌ-RYŪ *KENSHI*, RIGHT?
DON'T YOU HATE HIM?
HATE HIM...? OF *COURSE* I HATE HIM. BUT SO *WHAT?* MAYBE WE KILL SOME OF THEM. BUT AS LONG AS ANOTSU'S GRANDSON IS STILL ALIVE...
...ITTŌ-RYŪ WILL JUST KEEP GROWING.
ぞぞぞ
NO MORE *WASTING TIME.* I'VE GOT TO MEET ANOTSU *HIMSELF.*
AND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
WELL, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...
...FINE BY ME.





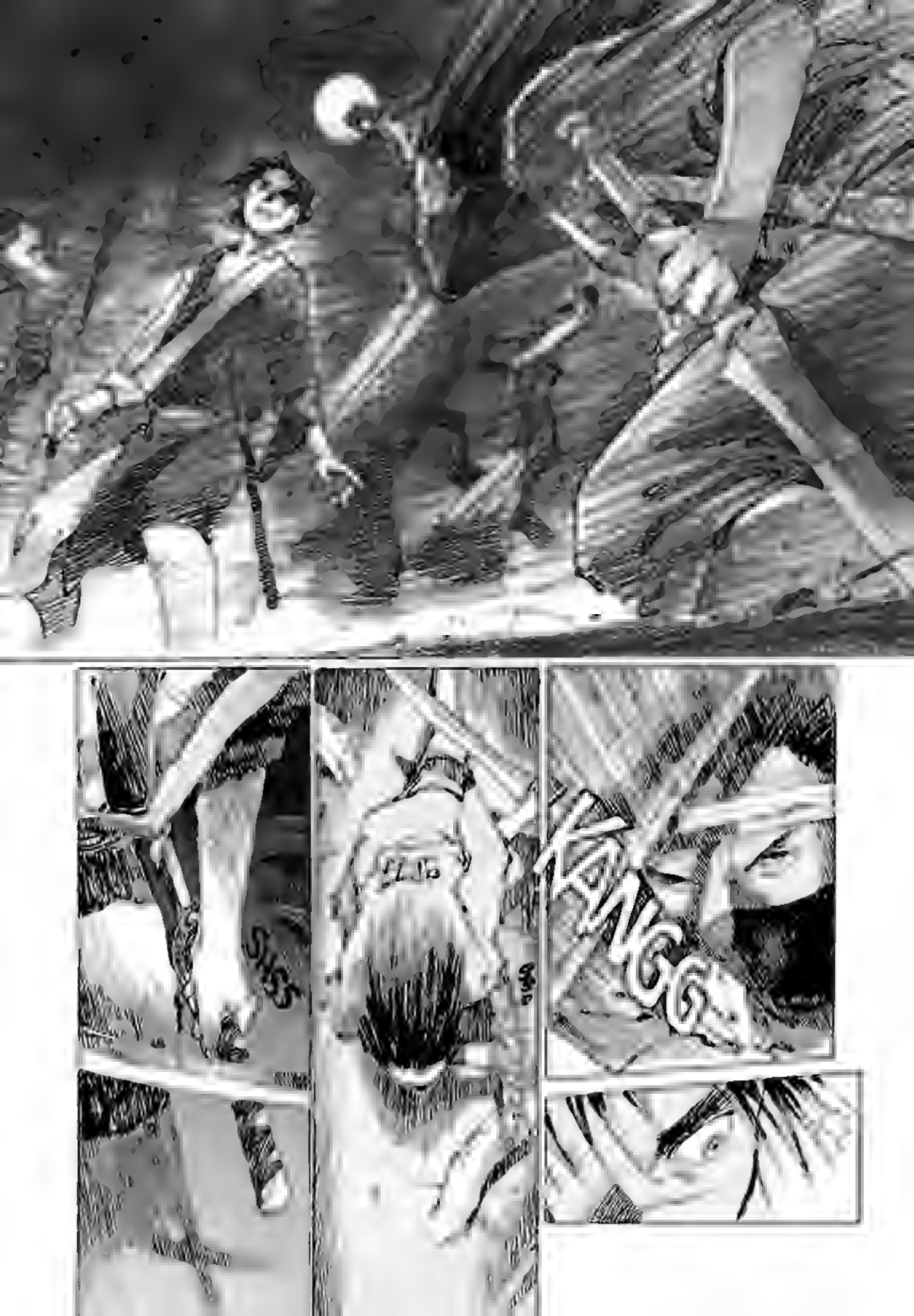
RIN
?

HMPH.
THE ONLY THING SHE'S GROWN UP ABOUT IS EATING AND CRYING
SHE CALLS THAT PUTTING THINGS BEHIND HER? SHIT.
AH. WELL
GUESS THAT'S JUST THE WAY SHE
KTAK

I SAW YOUR FACE ON A WANTED POSTER
FORMER RETAINER FOR A DAIMYŌ EH?
I WOULD'VE SWORN IT SAID YOUR CRIME WAS "ONE HUNDRED MURDERS"
I'LL TAKE DAMN GOOD "ONIGA" I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT ME FOR
BUT LET'S GET IT OVER WITH QUICK MISTER MANJI
HEY ? WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT
I JUST WANT YOU TO FIGHT ME !
HUH ? WHY ?

I'VE GOT MY REASONS
AND IF I WIN
I'LL TAKE THAT CHINESE SWORD OF YOURS!
HEH HEH HEH...
HEH HEH...
BWA HAHA HAW!!
THIS IS GREAT!
SO I WAS RIGHT! THAT GIRL REALLY IS ASANO'S DAUGHTER! AM I RIGHT OR WHAT, EH, MANJI OLD PAL?!
SHE WAS SCARED SHITLESS SO I SORTA FIGURED IT OUT
I WAS WAITING FOR HER TO COME AFTER ME
GUESS SHE FIGURES SHE CAN'T BEAT ME SO SHE HIRES SOMEONE ELSE TO DO IT FOR HER HUH?
OKAY FRIEND IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING YEAH... THIS IS ASANO'S SWORD I TOOK IT

HEY, I'M IMPRESSED. BUT I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU'D CUT THE CRAP
SO HOW ABOUT IT?! ARE YOU COMING DOWN OR WHAT?!
HEH HEH...


KANG

AH?!
HEH

S... SON OF A BITCH !
FIRST RULE OF WAR--
--RE-STRICTING YOUR ENEMY'S MOBILITY IS EIGHTY PERCENT OF VICTORY.
GET IT? IT MEANS DUMBSHITS WHO ONLY STRIKE TO KILL ARE LIKELY TO LOSE THEIR LEGS!
THANKS FOR THE TIP!
SNAK!
WHISS!

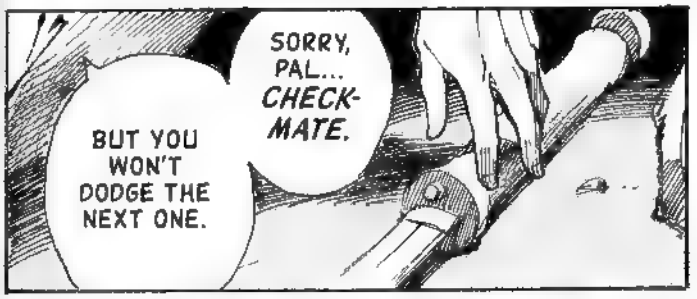
A HIDDEN BLADE?!
STOP ACTING SO SURPRISED!
HYAAH!

FRAK

THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN MISSING... THIS IS HOW TO FIGHT!
I LIKE YOU, PAL!

DAMN... ARE ALL YOU ITTŌ-RYŪ GUYS THIS TOUGH?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?! I'LL SAY A PRAYER FOR YOU WHEN YOU'RE DEAD!

MAGATSU TAITO!
YOU'RE THE FIRST GUY OUTSIDE OF OUR DŌJŌ I COULDN'T KILL THAT WAY.


BUT YOU WON'T DODGE THE NEXT ONE.
SORRY, PAL... CHECK-MATE.

AH... YOU MEAN THIS?

SUCCH

YEAH. WELL. YOU SURPRISED ME
BUT I'M KIND OF USED TO THINGS LIKE THIS
HEH
HEH HEH HEH
I WAS BORN HERE IN SENZOKU VILLAGE
MY OLD HOME'S NOT A STONE'S THROW AWAY
THIS FOREST WAS THE PERFECT PLAYGROUND FOR A KID MY PALS AND I CAME HERE ALL THE TIME
?
YOU KNOW THIS PLACE BRINGS BACK MEMORIES
NOTHING'S CHANGED NOT A THING

WHEN I WAS ONLY ABOUT FOUR YEARS OLD
...THERE WAS A HUGE FLOOD ALL AROUND THIS AREA-- THAT'S WHY THE TREES ARE DEAD. FOR SOME REASON, THE WATER NEVER DRAINED OUT OF THIS END OF THE WOODS.
THE WHOLE THING TURNED INTO A SWAMP.
ONE OF MY FRIENDS DIDN'T KNOW THAT. HE CAME DOWN HERE ALONE...
...AND WHEN I FOUND HIM HE WAS DEAD...
SUCKED INTO THE BOG.
SAD STORY, HUH...? A NATURAL TRAP... YOU'D NEVER KNOW TO LOOK AT IT.
NOW I REMEMBER WHERE IT WAS--
--THERE! RIGHT WHERE YOU'RE STANDING, FOOL!

AAAH!!
I WONDERED
BWA HA HA HA
I GUESS YOU'RE NOT USED TO FIGHTING IN PLACES LIKE THIS
ANYWAY THANKS FOR LISTENING TO MY STORY

SECOND RULE OF WAR!
HE WHO HOLDS THE LAND CAN CONQUER HEAVEN!
MY FIRST MOVE WAS KNOCKING YOU TOWARD THE TREE
AND YOU WENT LIKE A GOOD BOY
RIGHT THERE, JUST A FEW YARDS BETWEEN US..
...RUNS THE SANZU NO KAWA -- THE RIVER OF THE DEAD!
SHIT!
GLSSH
HEH. GIVING IT A GOOD TRY, I SEE ACTUALLY, YOU KNOW.
...IT'S PROBABLY NOT TOO LATE.

BUT--!
THUNK
KANG

—SO
MUCH
FOR
THAT!

CHOK
MAY AS WELL FINISH MY STORY, EH?
I'M THE SON OF PEASANTS
LIFE WASN'T EASY BUT WE WERE A HAPPY FAMILY
I HAD A YOUNGER SISTER JUST ONE
ONE DAY, I WAS PLAYING BALL WITH HER NEAR THE MAIN ROAD
WE HAD THE BAD LUCK TO BE THERE WHEN A SANGIN PROCESSION WENT THROUGH

MY SISTER KICKED THE BALL WRONG. IT STARTLED THE DAIMYŌ'S HORSE. TO PUNISH HER...
...THEY CUT HER IN TWO! HEH, HEH...
BUT THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES, HUH? THEY DO THAT TO US PEASANTS...
...AND WE CAN'T PROTEST, CAN'T COMPLAIN. SO WHO'S GONNA JUDGE THE SAMURAI?! WHO LOOKS OUT FOR US?!
YOU USED TO BE SAMURAI. MY ENEMY.
AND THAT GIRL YOU'RE HELPING... HER, TOO.
I'M GOING TO GO KILL HER, NOW.
MAYBE IF YOU'D ONLY LOST ONE OF YOUR OWN FAMILY...
...YOU'D UNDER-STAND HOW I FEEL.

YOU...
....

YOU'RE NOT...
...THE *ONLY* TRAGIC HERO...

...LET YOU KILL ME...
...TWICE!
DAMNED IF I...
SHIK
UHD
HEH HEH...
HNNG.

YOU SAID YOU'RE "KIND OF USED TO THINGS LIKE THIS" ?
USED TO IT?!
HAH! HA HA HA!
IT'S BEEN REAL INTERESTING MASTER MANJI
WE GOTTA DO THIS AGAIN SOMETIME
FWAK
ASSUMING BOTH OF US LAST OUT THE NIGHT
. . .
. . .
DAMN IT HURTS

WHAM
MANJI !
THIS...!
IT WAS OUTSIDE MY ROOM WHEN I GOT UP.

DON'T ACT STUPID! WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?!
I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU I'D DECIDED TO PUT IT BEHIND ME!
WHO ASKED YOU TO DO THAT, HUH?! WHO?!
ANOTHER YEAR...
AND I'D VE FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT IT BUT NOW! WITH THIS, THIS
ALL THAT PAIN FOR A STUPID SWORD! FOR A SPOILED LITTLE BRAT...!
WH- WHAT IF YOU'D BEEN KILLED?! HOW COULD I EVER...

SOB SOB
SNIFF
AS IF I'M GONNA DIE..
WHY'D YOU DO IT...?
YOU STUPID, STUPID...
OKAY. I'LL TOSS IT.
UH? AH!!
....
LOOK, RIN...
...GET SERIOUS. THIS WHOLE JOURNEY... REMEMBER?
YOU STARTED IT BECAUSE YOUR PARENTS WERE KILLED.
WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU FORGET HOW TO CRY FOR YOUR PARENTS?
WHAT WILL YOU DO THEN?

SURE THE MEMORIES HURT BUT IF YOU CAN HOLD ON TO THEM
SOME TIMES THEY CAN MAKE YOU STRONG AS STEEL
YEAH THIS TIME
THAT'S WHAT SAVED MY ASS
SO JUST ACCEPT IT HELL YOU'RE GOING TO FORGET THEM SOON ENOUGH AS IT IS
WHY GO OUT OF YOUR WAY TO MAKE IT HAPPEN? WHAT A PAIN IN THE BUTT
DUMB OL BROTHER !

HEY... WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?
OH, YOU DIDN'T HEAR ME?
TOUGH. I'M NOT GOING TO SAY IT AGAIN.
I...I LOOK LIKE HER, RIGHT? YOUR LITTLE SISTER. IT'S NOT FAIR, JUST ME CRYING ALL THE TIME.
IF YOU'RE STILL SO ATTACHED TO HER, YOU CRY FOR ONCE! LET'S SEE YOU CRY, MANJI--
SHUT UP AND GET OUT!
CLOSE THAT DOOR AND DON'T WAKE ME UP UNTIL LUNCH!
I... I'M SORRY!
YOU STUPID LITTLE IDIOT!
UP!
THE HELL I'M GONNA CRY! I'M NOT A SNOT-NOSED LITTLE KID LIKE YOU!

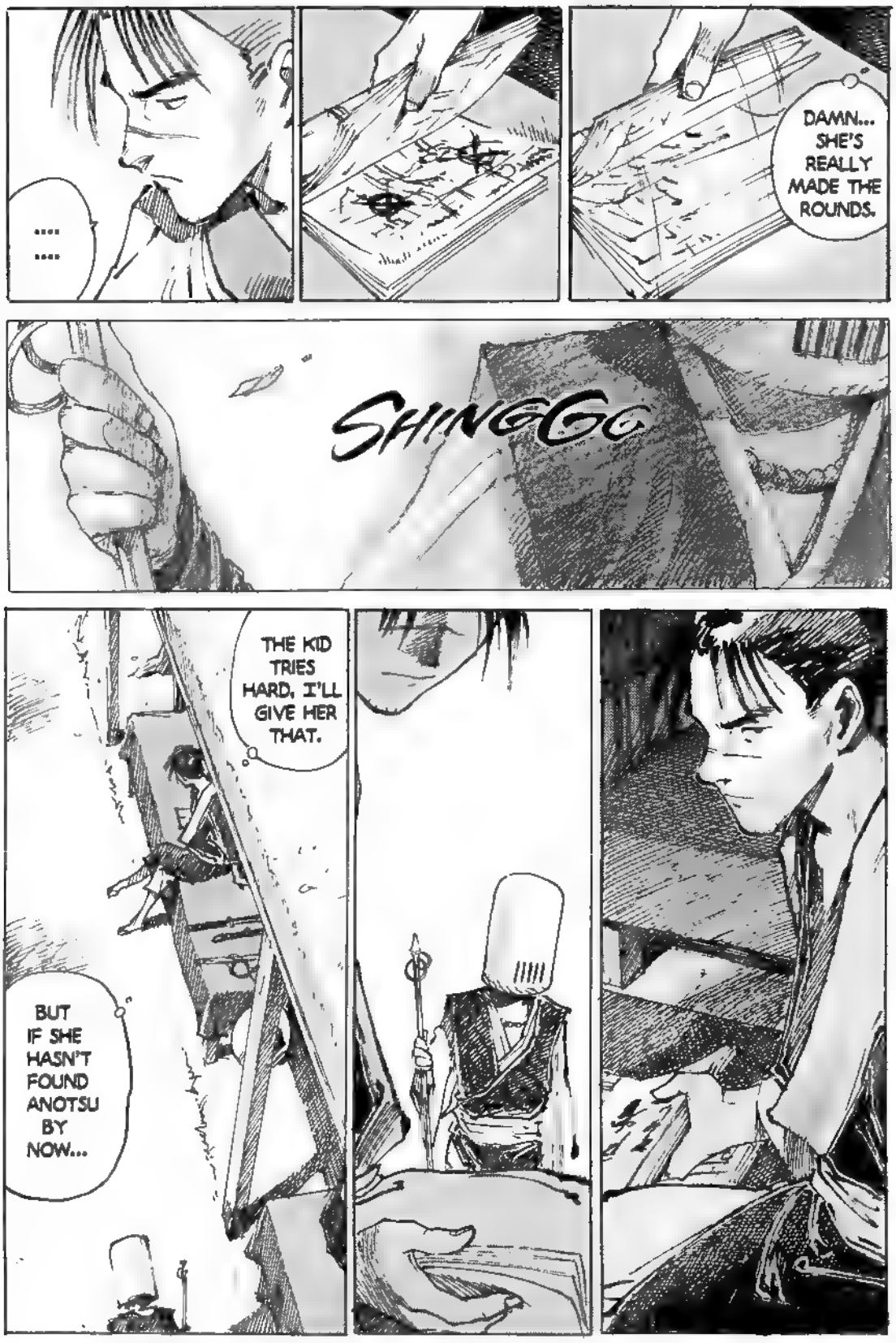
DUMB
OL'
HONORED
BROTHER
!

CRY OF THE WORM

Part 1: Path of Fire

NOW LOOK HERE, RIN.
IF YOU ADD UP...
ABOUT... MAYBE, UM... THIRTY MINUTES?
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE WE LEFT THE INN?
...THE INNS, THE MEALS...
...THIS MAP HERE, PLUS THE FERRYBOAT FARE, WELL...
..I SEEM TO REMEMBER IT WAS YOU WHO SAID WE SHOULD CUT OUT EVERY-THING EXCEPT THE ESSENTIALS, EH?
GEE, TEA AND SOME SWEET CAKES SHOULD HARDLY MATTER, RIGHT?
HEY! YOU VETOED MY SAKE LAST NIGHT, REMEMBER ?!
YEAH... GUESS I DID. SORRY.
AW, HELL. I'LL MAKE UP FOR IT WITH SOME TEA.

EXCUSE ME! WE'LL HAVE A *WARABI* SWEET-CAKE AND SOME BARLEY TEA.
AND UM CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE YOUR BATHROOM IS?
THE BATH-ROOM IS JUST OUT BACK, DEAR!
AH HAH! I *THOUGHT* SO! WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST COME OUT AND SAY IT?
SO WHAT'S UP? YOU GOT THE RUNS? OR IS IT YOUR PERIOD?
NONE OF YOUR DAMN BUSINESS!
WHO CARES WHAT IT IS, ANY-WAY?!
HEH...


....
....
DAMN... SHE'S REALLY MADE THE ROUNDS.
SHINGGG
THE KID TRIES HARD, I'LL GIVE HER THAT.
BUT IF SHE HASN'T FOUND ANOTSU BY NOW...

HEY, PAL!
IF YOU'RE NOT SITTING DOWN, THEN MOVE YOUR ASS, MONK MAN!
YOU'RE BLOCKING THE DAMN LIGHT!
HRM.
WHUD

HRMM...
....
....
THAT'S INTERESTING READING YOU'VE GOT THERE...
...YOUNG MAN.
IT'S JUST A DAMN MAP.
AH, YES, BUT THOSE MARKS...
...THOSE ARE THE SITES OF FENCING *DŌJŌ* ALL OVER EDO.
AND ALL OF THEM, MY BOY...
...ARE *DŌJŌ* THAT HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO HEEL BY A MAVERICK FACTION.

HO...
....
YOU'RE PRETTY UP ON THIS STUFF FOR A MAN OF THE CLOTH...
HEH HEH HEH... THERE'S STILL MORE I KNOW, YOUNGSTER.
I KNOW ABOUT THAT MAN YOU TWO ARE SEEKING.
YOU'LL NEVER MEET HIM THIS WAY, NOT IF YOU WALK ALL YEAR.
BUT AS FOR WHERE YOU MIGHT ACTUALLY FIND ANOTSU KAGEHISA...
...WELL, DEPENDING ON HOW YOU ANSWER ME...
...I MIGHT POSSIBLY BE INCLINED TO TELL YOU.

HAH! NOW JUST A SECOND, PAL...
...HOW COME YOU KNOW SO DAMN MUCH?!
UJI TEA!
WUH?
YES, SIR! UJI TEA COMING RIGHT UP, GOOD SIR!
ONE BARLEY TEA, SIR.
AND YOUR WARABI CAKE.
SOME SAKURA-MOCHI TOO, IF YOU PLEASE.
OH, WE'RE PLUMB OUT OF SAKURA-MOCHI, SIR. BUT OUR KASHIWA CAKES ARE MIGHTY FINE.
ALL RIGHT, THEN. ONE OF THOSE.
I'M SORRY I KEPT YOU WAITING, SIRS. I SURELY AM!
SO... HOW'D YOU KNOW?
HMM...?

AS FOR THOSE MARKS ON YOUR MAP BEING DŌJŌ...
...ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH THE STREETS OF THE CITY WOULD NOTICE SOON ENOUGH.
AND ALSO NOTICE THAT THEY ALL BELONG TO THE ITTŌ-RYŪ
THOSE YOUNGSTERS HAVE A LOT OF ENEMIES, THEY DO, WHAT WITH THEIR VIOLENT WAYS.
THERE'S NO END TO THE RASCALS WHO WOULD LIKE TO AMBUSH ANOTSU KAGEHISA AND CUT HIM DOWN.
YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THE PEACE-LOVING SORT YOURSELF, YOUNG MAN.
ANYONE WOULD NOTICE THAT, SOON ENOUGH!
....
WELL, SHIT...

BWAHAHA!
AIN'T THIS AMUSING! A MONK DETECTIVE!
I'M GLAD YOU LEARNED SOMETHING FROM ALL YOUR WALK-ING AROUND! HAW HAW HAW!
HEH, HEH... YEAH... I GET IT NOW. SO...
....
....
...JUST ONE MORE QUESTION.

YOU SAID *TWO* OF US HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR ANOTSU.
HOW'D YOU KNOW I'M NOT ALONE?
LET'S HEAR YOU EXPLAIN AWAY *THAT* ONE, EH?

HEH...
HO? I FIGURED YOU'D BE SOME OLD GEEZER
WHAT'S WITH THIS "YOUNG MAN" CRAP? YOU'VE ONLY GOT TEN YEARS ON ME, MAX.
SORRY... I'LL DISPENSE WITH THE FORMAL-ITIES.
YOU MUST BE MANJI, YES?

I AM ITTŌ-RYŪ SWORDSMAN...
... SHIZUMA EIKU.
AS YOU CAN SEE. I COME UNARMED.
YOUR WHOLE BODY, MAN...
...IT STINKS OF BLOOD.
HELL. I KNEW YOU WERE NO MONK...
KTAK
...THE SECOND YOU STOPPED IN FRONT OF ME.

SO FAR I'VE KILLED ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-EIGHT MEN. BUT YOU...
JUST GUESSING, MIND YOU...
YOU, I FIGURE...
...GOTTA BE TEN TIMES THAT, RIGHT?
WHAT THE HELL... DON'T MEAN SHIT TO ME. BUT TELL ME, PAL...
YOU REALLY FIGURE YOU OUGHTTA BE SHOOTING YOUR MOUTH OFF LIKE THAT?
I MEAN, IF YOU HADN'T GONE AND BLABBED, WE STILL WOULDN'T KNOW ANOTSU'S WHOLE NAME.
"BLABBED"...? SEEMS TO ME HIS NAME IS ALL I'VE TOLD YOU. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE...

...IT'S LIKE I SAID BEFORE.
YOU GIVE ME THE RIGHT ANSWER...AND I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT THE ITTŌ-RYŪ!
SO CUT THE CRAP!
ASK AWAY, PAL!
TELL ME... HAVEN'T YOU EVER WANTED FOLLOWERS OF YOUR OWN?
WELL...?
....
....
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WE CUT DOWN ANOTSU!

DON'T GET ME WRONG... IT'S NOT LIKE I HATE HIM. FAR FROM IT.
THE ESSENCE OF ITTŌ-RYŪ BEGINS WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL OTHER SCHOOLS OF SWORDFIGHTING.
THAT "WAY OF THE SWORD" HE PREACHES... I RESPECT HIM FOR THAT.
"WIPE AWAY ALL THE DISTINCTIONS, THE FACTIONS, THE SUBFACTIONS. SELECT ONLY THE VERY FINEST TECHNIQUES, PROVEN IN EVERY KIND OF BATTLE...
"...THEN USE THEM TO CREATE THE ULTIMATE SCHOOL OF THE SWORD. THE OLD SWORD SCHOOLS OF THE SAMURAI FAMILIES ARE JUST HOLLOW SHELLS.
IF HE CAN PULL THIS OFF, IT'LL BE A REVOLUTION."

"BUT YOU KNOW...
"...ANY IDEAL IS A MEANING-LESS DREAM IF YOU CAN'T MAKE IT HAPPEN."
ANOTSU KAGEHISA... YEAH, HE'S A KIND OF GENIUS, ALL RIGHT.
HIS SWORD-WORK, HIS JUDGMENT, BOTH FAR BEYOND HIS YEARS. HE IS TRULY EXTRA-ORDINARY.
BUT NO MATTER HOW STRONG HE IS, A HUMAN BEING IS STILL A HUMAN BEING.
THERE'S NO GUARANTEE HE WON'T DIE BEFORE HE MAKES THE DREAM HAPPEN.
IT TAKES SOMEONE WITH BOTH THE SKILL AND THE *TIME* TO ACHIEVE THE DREAM, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS.
THAT'S A *REAL* LEADER. AM I WRONG?

YOU HEARD ABOUT ME FROM THAT GUY MAGATSU, DIDN'T YOU?
ME AND MY LITTLE SECRET.
INDEED I DID. HE PRAISED YOUR SWORDWORK TO THE SKIES.
YOUR SWORD-WORK...
...AND YOUR IMMORTAL FLESH!
ME, YOU... WE CAN'T BEAT ANOTSU BY OUR-SELVES.
BUT THE TWO OF US TOGETHER...

IT'S BEEN VERY INTEREST-ING...
...SO I GUESS I'LL LET YOU LIVE. NOW BEAT IT!
THAT'S YOUR ANSWER...? IT'S NOT A BAD DEAL. FOR YOU...
...OR FOR ME. SO WHY...?
CALL IT INTUITION. OR MAYBE JUST THE SMELL OF IT.
YOU AND I, WE'RE THE SAME BREED.
WE'RE KILLERS AND LOVING IT.

FROM THIS PLACE UNTIL YOU'RE DOMINATED!
WE DON'T KNOW WE'RE ALIVE UNTIL WE SEE BLOOD FLOWING.
YEAH, THERE ARE A FEW OF US AROUND.
HELL, IT'S NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.
BUT, PAL... YOU BETTER GIVE UP ON THAT IDEA OF BEING NUMBER-ONE HONCHO.
HEY?
WHEN PEOPLE LIKE US GET INTO POWER...
...IT ALWAYS MEANS ONLY ONE THING--
--MASS MURDER!

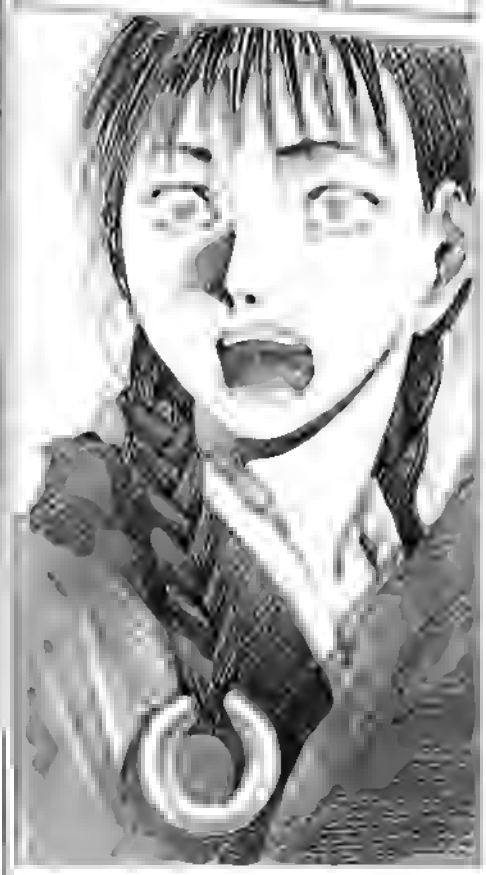
HEH...
SHINGG
...WE COULD RULE THE WORLD. WELL, TOO BAD.
IF YOU AND I WORKED TOGETHER...
...HEH HEH HEH...
ALL THE MORE REASON, MANJI.
BUT YOU KNOW, FOR A GUY THEY CALL THE "ONE-HUNDRED-MAN MURDERER," YOU'VE GOT A REAL CONSCIENCE.
QUITE A SURPRISE.

THANKS.
WHO SAYS I'M PRAISING YOU?! I THOUGHT YOU AND I WOULD UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.
IT'S A DAMN SHAME.

PHEW...

FAP
MANJI! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT ?!
DON'T SUPPOSE YOU COULD'VE KNOCKED THE TRAY OUT OF THE WAY, TOO, EH?
WHAT THE HELL WAS HE THINKING?
COMING AT ME WITH A DAGGER WHEN HE KNEW I'M IMMORTAL... VERY STRANGE.

AAAH... WHAT A DRAG...
WHAT WAS HE? ITTŌ-RYŪ?
YEAH. BUT Y'KNOW...
...THESE DAYS IT SEEMS I'M MORE FAMOUS THAN YOU ARE.
I'M SORRY... THIS IS ALL MY FAULT...
FORGET IT! IT'S A LOT EASIER THAN WORRYING ABOUT SAVING YOUR SKIN.
I GOT A BOUNTY ON MY HEAD, REMEMBER?
SORRY 'BOUT THIS, DARLIN'.
I'LL PAY FOR THE DEAD GUY'S TEA.
?



I... I'LL SAY IT...
...ONE MORE TIME.
YOU AND I... WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.
....
....!

WAS IT THAT OLD HAG?
?
C'MON...YOU DIDN'T GET 'EM DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS OF TIBET OR NOTHING. AND THERE CAN'T BE *THAT* MANY PEOPLE WANDERING AROUND STUFFED WITH *KESSEN-CHU.*
I'M ASKING IF YAOBIKUNI GOT TO YOU.
...SHE HAD TATTOOS... ON HER CHEEKS AND FOREHEAD.
KANG!
IT WAS AN OLD LAMA NUN...
NO-- *NO WAY!* SHE WOULDN'T! NOT HER!
SHE CAN'T BE HELPING THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*...?!

YOU GOT IT WRONG, KID. WHEN I WAS GIVEN THE WORMS...
...IT WAS LONG BEFORE ANYONE EVER DREAMED OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
HO! AND JUST HOW LONG BEFORE?
EH?
MAYBE 200 YEARS.
GAAAH!!
TWO HUN-DRED?!
BUT THAT WAS STILL THE MUROMACHI PERIOD!
DAMN RIGHT! WITH THESE EYES...
...I'VE SEEN THE DYNASTIES FALL!!

DEATH IS MERCI-LESS. BUT LET ME TELL YOU...
...NOT BEING ABLE TO DIE IS CRUELER STILL.
THAT MEANS THAT YAOBIKUNI IS EVEN OLDER THAN THAT, RIGHT?
BUT THEY'RE GONE. ALL OF THEM. GONE ON BEFORE ME...
I'VE TAKEN FIVE WOMEN TO BE MY WIFE, AND I'VE HAD MORE BEST FRIENDS THAN THAT.
?!
MANJI!
I'LL JUST LET YOUR ANSWER REST FOR THE TIME BEING. BUT REMEMBER...
BUT... THERE IS SOMETHING THAN CAN BE DONE ABOUT THAT.

...NOTHING IN THIS WORLD LIVES FOREVER, AND WE ARE NO EXCEPTION...
...AS YOU'LL FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF... TONIGHT!
WHAT THE HELL...?
SHING

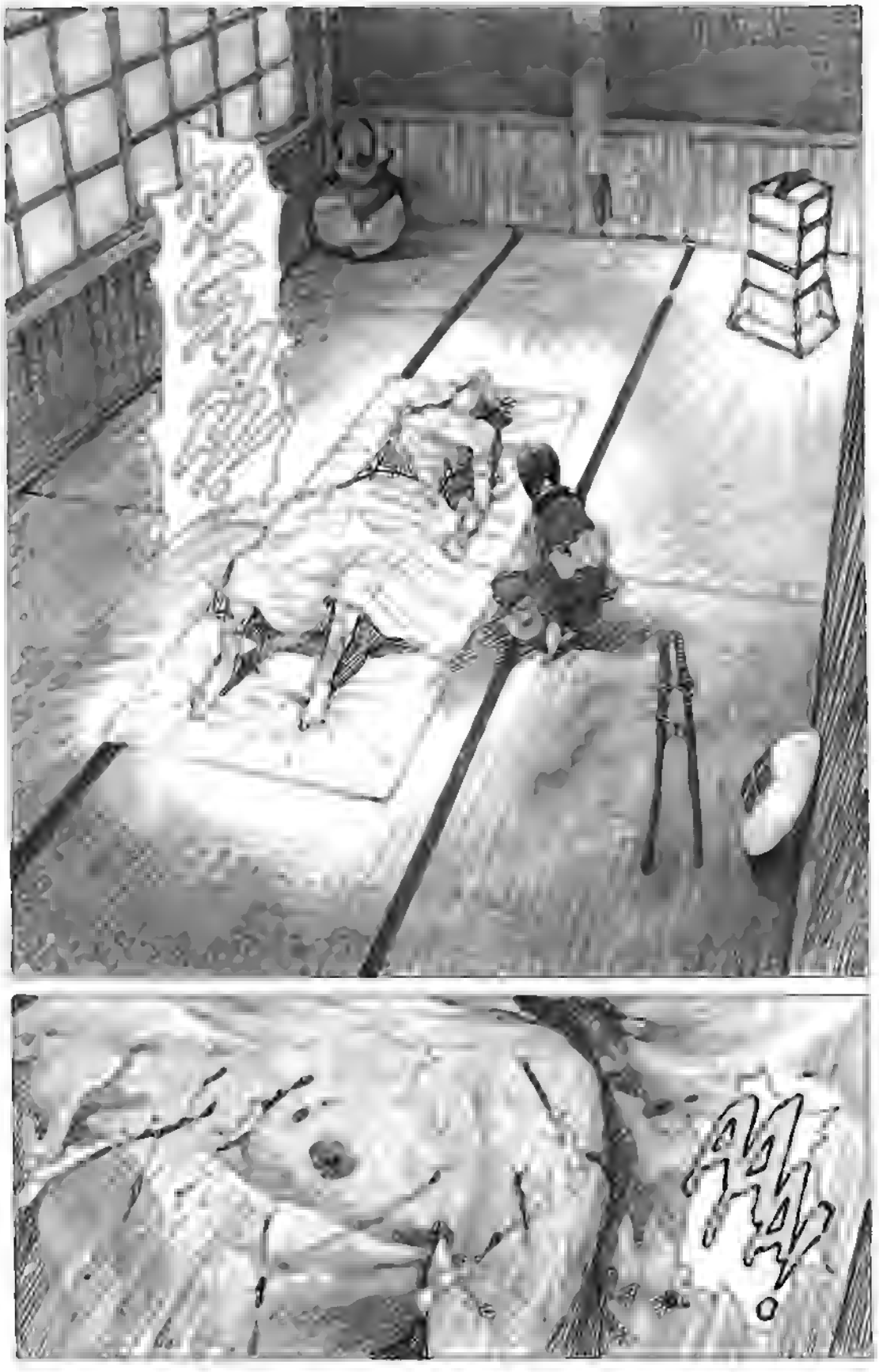
TH-TH-THAT MAN... WH-WHAT IS HE?! AND Y-YOU, TOO...?
UHH...
MANJI!
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY?!
NOW THAT'S WEIRD...
THE WORMS... THEY HAVEN'T COME OUT...!

R-RIN...
G-GET...
...GET THE HELL OUT...!
HHN GOKI!
SPLAT
OH, M-MY...
G-GOD...
SPK!
SPK!
SPK!
AAAGH!!
EEEK!
MANJI!!!

MANJI...
MANJI?!
WHAT...
...WHAT'S HAPPENING?
MANJI?
ARE... ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO DIE?!

CRY OF THE WORM

Part 2: Path of Blood



NO... OH, NO!
MANJI! YOUR SCARS!
THEY'RE OPENING UP AGAIN!
H-HEH... HEH.
GOOD JOB, PAL.
TH-THAT DAMN SHIZUMA EIKU...HE DID THIS!

P-
POISON?
YEAH... GOTTA BE.
PROB-ABLY... THAT DAGGER THIS MORNING...
MOST POISONS... I COULDN'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT...
...BUT THIS ONE...
HRKK!
NNGAAH!
M-
MANJI!

WELL. SHIT.
SO THAT'S ALL SHE WROTE. EH?

RIN! LISTEN... IF I DIE... DON'T...
...DON'T GO AFTER ANOTSU ALONE! FIND ANOTHER--

SHUT UP!
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT! I WON'T!

MANJI... TAKE THESE
UNGG...
?
IT'S AN ANTI-DOTE I LEARNED ABOUT FROM MY MOTHER.
THEY'RE PILLS ROLLED FROM DOSEI-MATSUKO AND BENGO.

DAMN PILLS... WON'T HELP-- UNDER-STAND?
DON'T EVEN KNOW... WHAT THE POISON... IS--
JUST DO IT!
TAKE THEM! DO IT NOW!
HEY...?! WHERE'RE YOU GOING?!
TO GET YOU A DOC-TOR!
DON'T BE STUPID. A DOCTOR CAN'T DO ANYTHING FOR THIS... AND BESIDES...
...I DON'T WANT YOU GOING OUT ALONE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT!
....
I'LL BRING HIM RIGHT BACK...
RIN!
KTAK!

SHOJIMA SENSEI
CAN'T FOUND ON THEM

MANJI'S RIGHT, ANYWAY... HIS BODY JUST ISN'T NORMAL.
THERE'S NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO FOR HIM.
NOT UNLESS THEY'VE GOT THE SAME KIND OF BODY...
SHIZUMA...?
AAAGGHH!!
BUT HE'S THE ENEMY
CHILD...
OH HO!

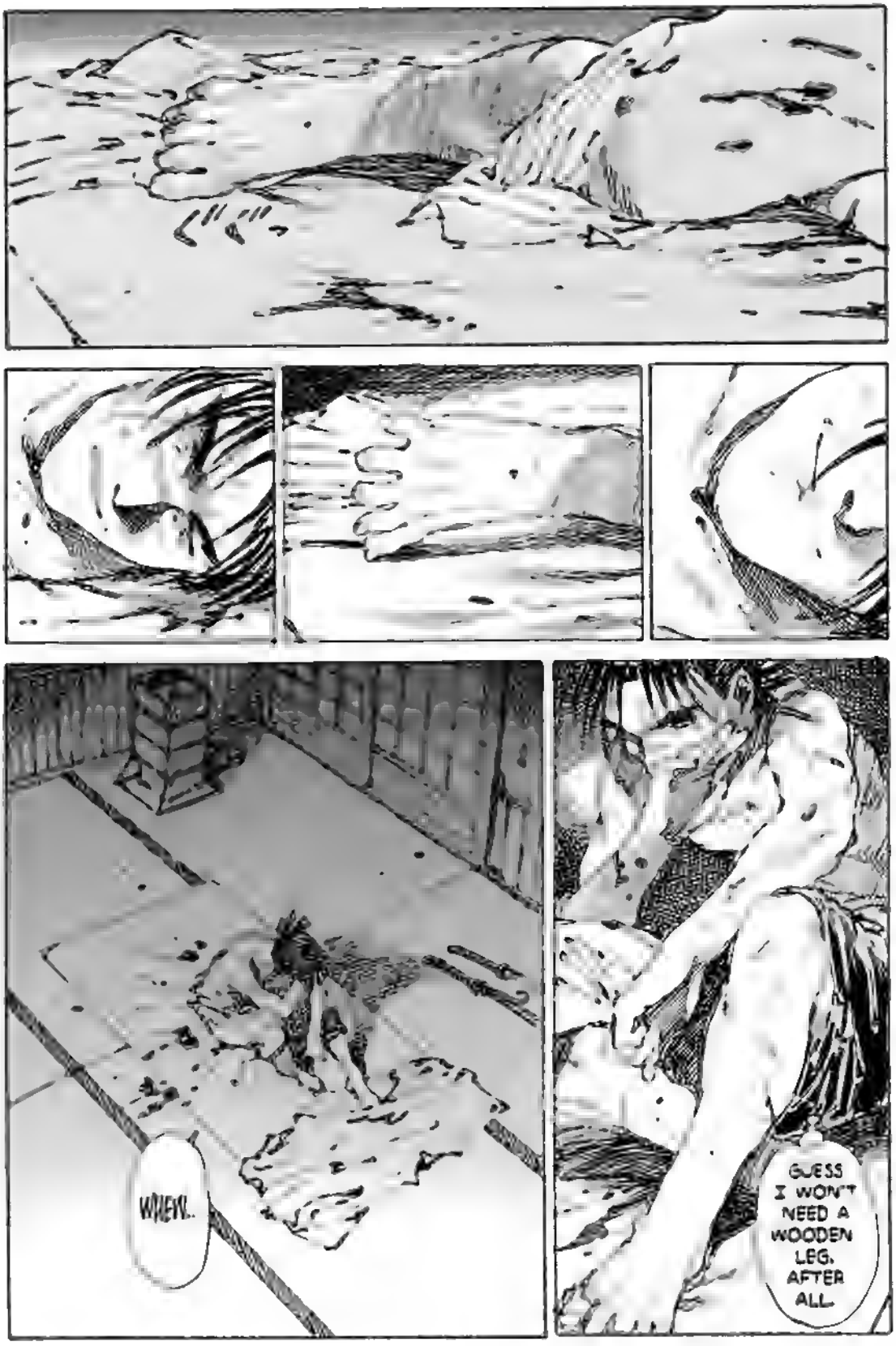
REMEMBER
ME.
LONG

HO... THAT IMMORTAL YOUNG MAN, IN SUCH A STATE...
I FEEL... IT'S LIKE... MY HEAD IS SPINNING...
I CAN'T EVEN FIND A DOCTOR...
WHY DID HE HAVE TO LEAVE JUST NOW?!
KESSEN-CHU... WAS IT? WHAT YOU HAVE, YAOBIKUNI.
ISN'T THAT WHAT THE PROBLEM IS...?
SHIZUMA EIKU... SUCH AN OLD, FAMILIAR NAME. IF THIS IS REALLY HIS DOING...
...I CAN'T VERY WELL SAY IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS.

THERE'S ONLY ONE POISON IN THIS BIG, WIDE WORLD WHAT CAN KILL US, CHILD.
IF HE'S GONE AND GOTTEN A HOLD OF IT... NOW, THAT'S TROUBLE.
WILL YOU COME WITH ME NOW?
I'LL MIX YOU UP AN ANTI-DOTE.
Y- YES, MA'AM!
BUT FIRST...
YES...?
WHERE ARE YOUR SANDALS?
....
HEH HEH... PRETTY STUPID, HUH?
...I GUESS I WAS IN SUCH A HURRY...
AH...

OH NO, NO... YOU'RE JUST BESIDE YOURSELF WITH WORRY, DEARIE.
REALLY? YOU THINK SO?
BUT I CAN'T LOOK AFTER BOTH OF YOU, IF YOU GET HURT, TOO.
YOU WEAR MY SANDALS, AND CARRY ME ON YOUR BACK, MM?
YES, MA'AM!
HM?
SHALL WE GALLOP OFF AND GALLOP RIGHT BACK?
SO, BEFORE POOR OLD KANJI DIES IN HIS SLEEP...
MA'AM, DIDN'T YOU JUST CALL MANJI...
...KANJI OR SOMETHING...?
AH... ER...
COME NOW! WHAT'S IN A NAME, CHILD?!

FORGET
HAHA
HAHA!!


WHEW..
GUESS I WON'T NEED A WOODEN LEG, AFTER ALL.

KRAAK

WHAT KEPT YOU, YOU DUMB KID?!
WELL, SHIT!
UNNG... DAMN.

WHD
RIN, YOU STUPID, CRAZY FOOL!
I TOLD YOU! THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU!
....!
THAT BASTARD!

AH... E- EXCUSE ME...?

ER...
MY... MY GRAND-SON?
AMAZING HOW THEY CAN SLEEP ANYWHERE, ISN'T IT?

SHH... IT'S OKAY...
PLEASE... AT THE VERY LEAST...GIVE MANJI THE ANTIDOTE.
THE *KESSEN-SATSU* POISON.
I FOUND IT BY CHANCE, LONG AGO, WHEN I WAS WANDERING AROUND TIBET.

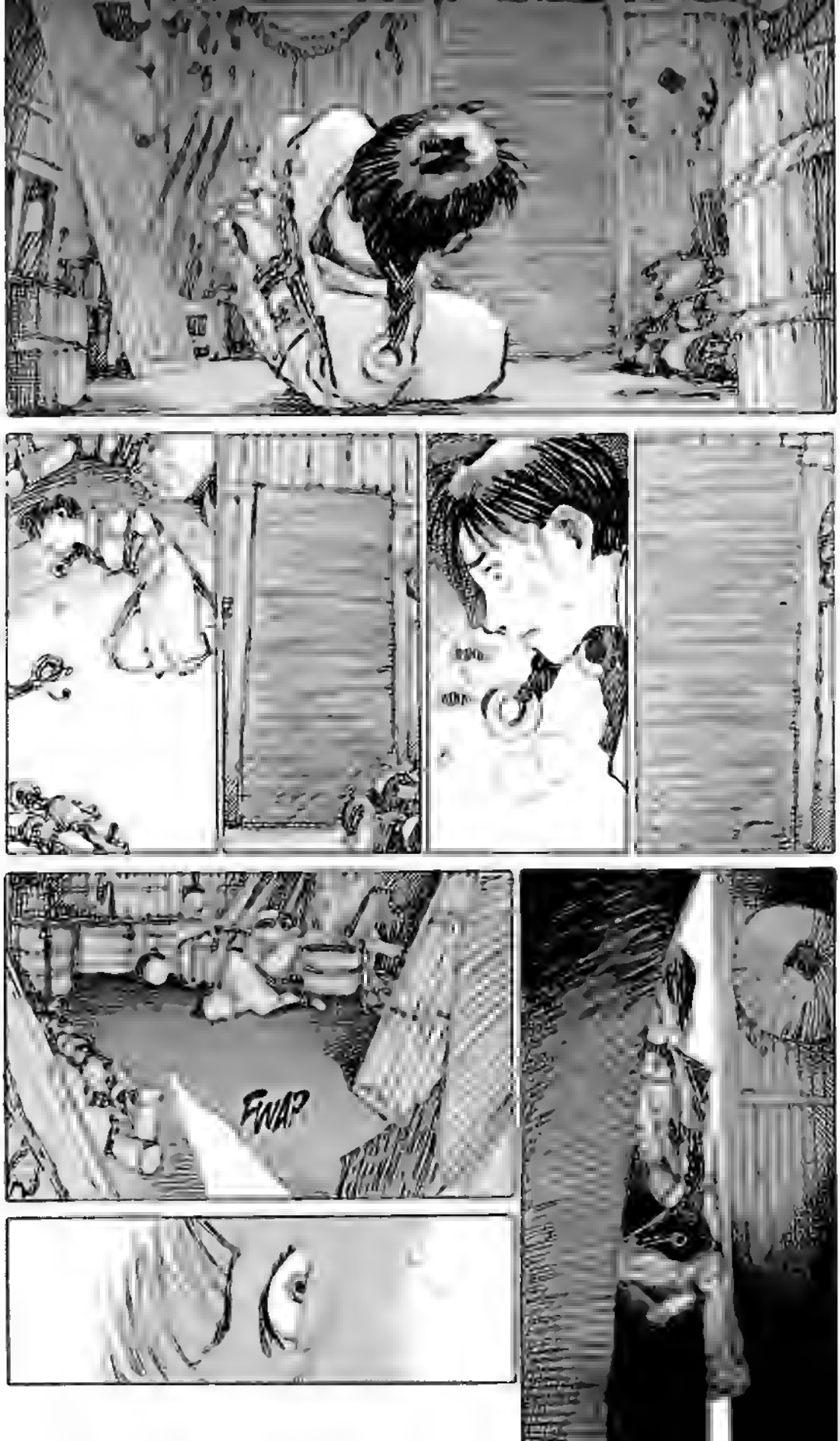
THE KESSEN-CHU NEST IN OUR BODIES, BY THE THOUSANDS, THE TENS OF THOUSANDS...
WHEN THEIR HOSTS ARE INJURED, THEY GIVE UP THEIR LIVES TO SEAL THE WOUND. THEIR BODIES SUBSTITUTE FOR WHAT HAS BEEN DESTROYED.
OUR BODIES RELY ON THE "BINDING" OF THESE LOATHSOME CREATURES.
MANJI... YAOBIKUNI... MYSELF...OUR IMMORTAL LIVES HANG BY A THREAD OF DEAD WORMS.
YOU COULD DRINK THIS POISON AND NOT FEEL A THING.
BUT FOR US, IT DISSOLVES THE WORMS WHEREVER THEY'VE BOUND OUR BODIES TOGETHER.
UNTIL AT LAST, AFTER A TIME OF CONVULSIONS, THE OLD WOUNDS REOPEN ALL OVER OUR BODIES.
AND THE PAIN, THAT EXQUISITE PAIN...

IF YOU'VE NEVER BEEN MORTALLY WOUNDED...
...YOU CAN SURVIVE *KESSEN-SATSU*. BUT FOR THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE DIED BEFORE...
THEN...
THEN *MANJI*...?!
NAW. DON'T WORRY.
THE LITTLE BIT HE GOT PROBABLY WASN'T ENOUGH TO KILL HIM. AND IF IT *WAS* A LETHAL DOSE...
THIS *KESSEN-SATSU* STUFF...
...THEN HE'S DEAD MEAT BY NOW.
...IT HAS *NO* ANTI-DOTE!

SO...I RAN OUT LIKE AN IDIOT AND GOT CAUGHT... FOR NOTHING.
AAA...!
THERE WAS NO CHOICE-- I HAD NO CHOICE!
I'M SORRY! I AM SO SORRY, YOUNG MISS!
HE THREATENED TO KILL MY GRANDSON!
AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE'D DO--
I GUESS YOU'RE STILL IN YOUR FORTIES. IN THE DARK I COULDN'T TELL.
I'M A FOOL.

ANY-WAY...
...YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE. THAT'S THE WAY IT IS. PARENTS AND CHILDREN...
THIS GUY... I DOUBT HE'S IN ANY HURRY...
...TO KILL ME.
DEAR...
YOU WAIT! I'LL GO GET HELP...
THIS I SWEAR!
....
...!

?!
W-
WAIT!
STOP!
STOP!!
PLEASE
DON'T!
WHAT'RE
YOU
GOING
TO
DO?!
I
BEG
YOU!!


FWAP

WH-WHAT DID YOU GET OUT OF THAT?! MURDER-ING HER?!
WHY'D YOU KILL HER? WHY?!
YOU'RE NOT A SAMURAI! YOU HAVE NO HONOR!
YOU DESERVE TO DIE, YOU GUTTER TRASH!
WHAT IS THERE TO CRY ABOUT?
THE WOMAN WAS A TOTAL STRANGER.

JUST... LIKE MY MOTHER...
...WHY DO YOU HAVE TO KILL SOMEONE LIKE THAT?
WHY? SOMEONE WITHOUT EVEN A SWORD...
YOU... YOU...
...JUST DON'T GET IT!
WHUD

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW...
...THEN I WILL TEACH YOU.
SHKK

"TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO. WHEN OUR LAND WAS STILL AT WAR...
"I SERVED A WARLORD.
"MY WIFE AND MY FRIENDS ALIKE, ALL LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES FOR THAT MAN.
"AND I TOO. I MADE MY VERY BODY IMMORTAL TO SERVE HIM.
"I KILLED AT LEAST A THOUSAND MEN ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE...
"AND THEN. AT THE END OF OUR LONG STRUGGLE. WHAT WAS LEFT TO US...?
"THE BRUTAL PEACE OF A WORLD CONQUERED BY TOYOTOMI AND HIS MEN...
"...AND THE SEVERED HEAD OF OUR LORD. ROLLING IN THE RUINS OF HIS CASTLE."

TODAY. NOW THAT TOYOTOMI IS GONE AS WELL. I SOMETIMES WONDER...
...WHO *WERE* THOSE PEOPLE WHO DIED IN BATTLE?
"THE ONLY ONES WHO LEAVE THEIR NAMES BEHIND THEM ARE A HANDFUL OF OVERLORDS.
"EVEN A GREAT *WARLORD* DEFEATED IN BATTLE IS A *WORM*, A PITIFUL *WORM*.
"AND THOSE OF US WHO NEVER EVEN ACHIEVED *THAT?*
"WE WERE NOTHING BUT PAWNS FROM THE DAY WE WERE BORN."
PEASANT. SAMURAI. ALL THE SAME.
ME...
YOU...
MY WIFE AND MY FRIENDS...
BORN AS WORMS...
SHKK
DYING AS WORMS...

LICK IT!
YOU SEE... SOMETIMES, AND SOMETIMES WHEN THE FRESH INCLINE PRESS THE GETHER...
THE BLOOD BECOMES A MEDIUM... AND THE BE PASSED ON.

THEN YOU'LL FINALLY BE QUALIFIED.
QUALIFIED TO TALK ABOUT THE MAJESTY OF LIFE.
NOW... YOU TAKE THE CHANCE.
FOR ENDLESS LIFE. TO WITNESS ENDLESS DEATH.
DO THAT, AND THEN, SOME-DAY...
...YOU'LL UNDERSTAND WHY, IN LIFE OR IN DEATH, THAT WOMAN WASN'T WORTH A SECOND GLANCE.
JUST THINK-- IF YOUR FLESH WAS IMMORTAL, HOW EASY TO TAKE REVENGE!

?!
AH...

HEH, HE? WHAT HAPPENED IN THIS HUT...
THOK
M. MANJI!
I'LL MAKE YOU CRY LIKE THAT!!
COME ON OUT AND PLAY!
IT'S A PERFECT MOONLIT NIGHT FOR DEATH... RIGHT, SHIZUMA?

PLOOM
YO, SHIZUMA.
FIGURE YOU MUST'VE LEARNED PLENTY IN TWO HUNDRED YEARS...
HOW ABOUT YOU SHOW ME?

CRY OF THE WORM

Part 3: Path of the Sword

I TOLD YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS AFTER-NOON.
EVEN IF IT KILLS HIM?
SHIT MAN...
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M TALKIN' 'BOUT.
SO I FIGURED

I NEVER EXPECTED MUCH FROM YOU ANYWAY.
SO NO MORE CRYING.
IF IT WAS THAT EASY TO PASS ON THE WORMS...
...I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TO...
...LOSE ANYONE.

MAYBE YOU COULD CALL IT SATORI ONE DAY I REALIZED THAT...
...ALL I HAD REALLY NEEDED. ALL ALONG. WERE PEOPLE JUST LIKE ME.
SORRY PAL... I'M NOT INTER-ESTED...
...IN BEING YOUR WIFE.
POOR KID... JUST LOOK AT THOSE BRUISES.
MAN...
THAT OLD WOMAN--

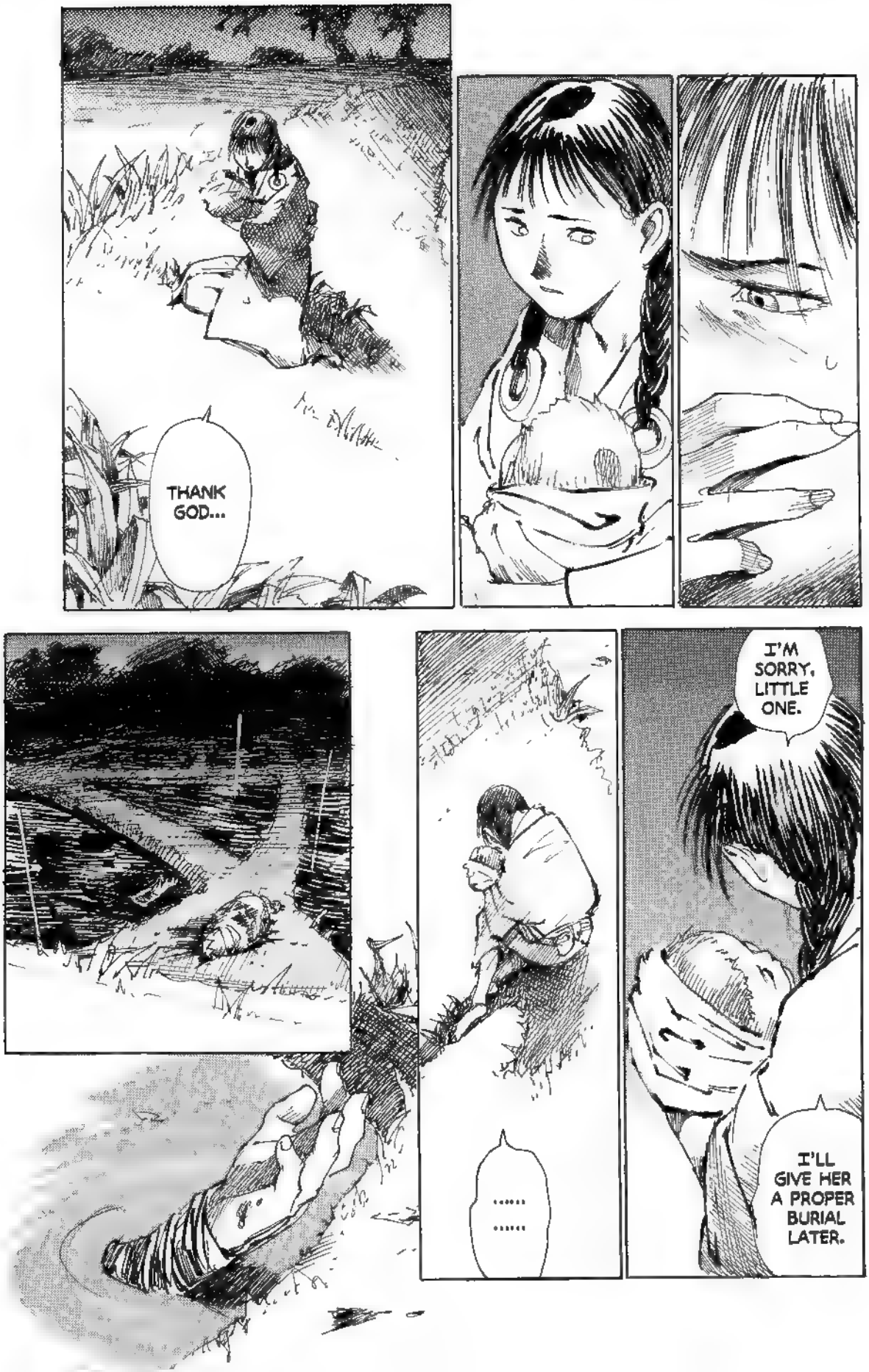
THE ONE OUT FRONT, ALL DONE UP LIKE YAOBIKUNI!?
DON'T KNOW WHO THE HELL SHE IS, BUT... SHE'S GONE TO MEET HER MAKER.
N... NO!
THE LITTLE SQUALLER'S OKAY, THOUGH.
IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT HIM, GO GET HIM.
DON'T WANT HIM DROWNING IN THE RICE PADDY, I GUESS.
BUT... BUT I DON'T WANT TO SEE--
IT'S A LITTLE LATE TO BE AFRAID OF BLOOD, GIRL!
BESIDES, IF YOU STAY HERE YOU'RE GOING TO SEE WORSE...
...MUCH WORSE.

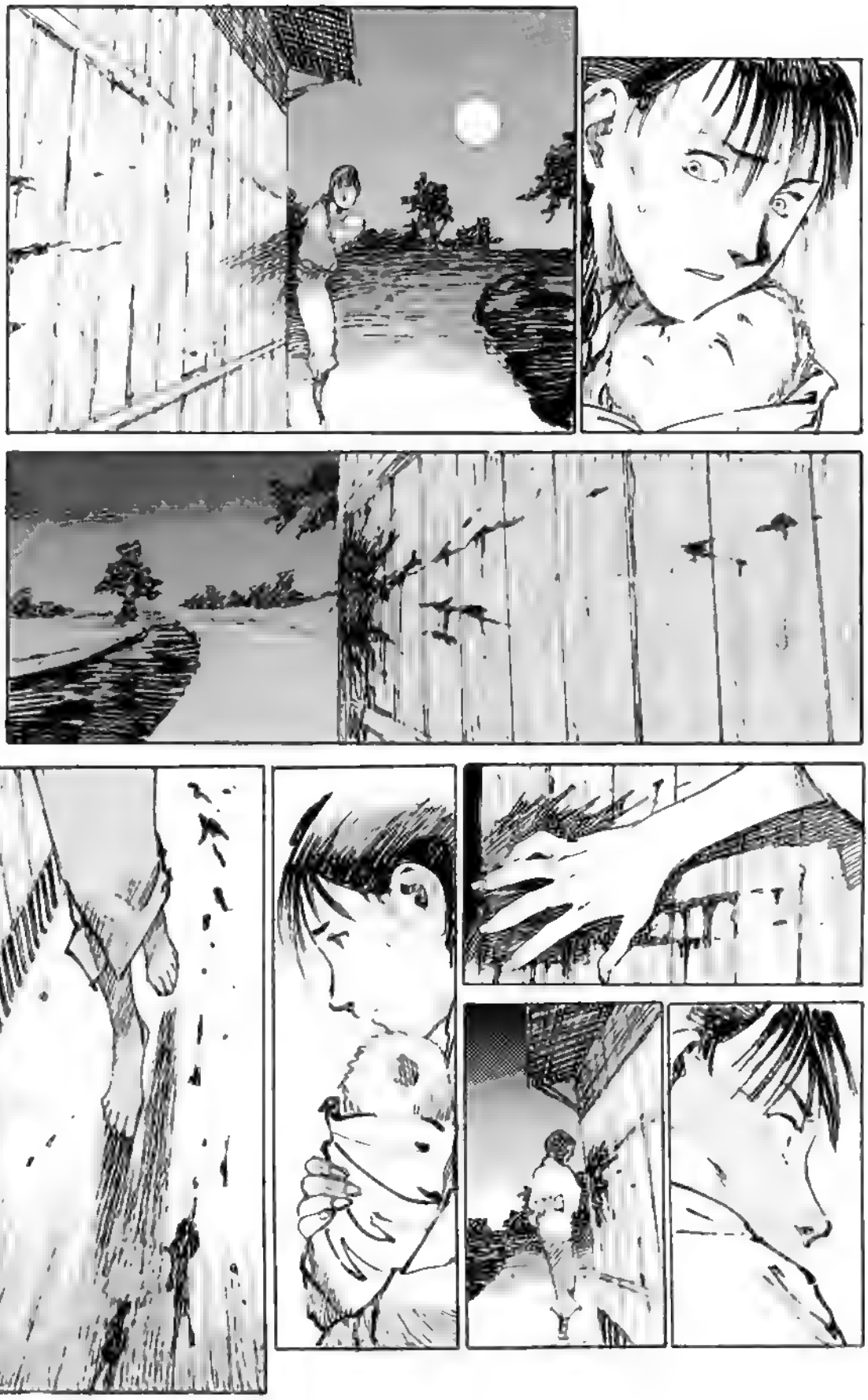
B-
BUT...
.....
GO
NOW
!!
.....
.....

PLEASE HIT
MOM'S CHICKEN SOUP MAYBE...
HEH HEH
"CHICKEN SOUP" SHE'S VERY FUNNY
THEM
WELL, IT DOESN'T MATTER... I WAS IMPATIENT

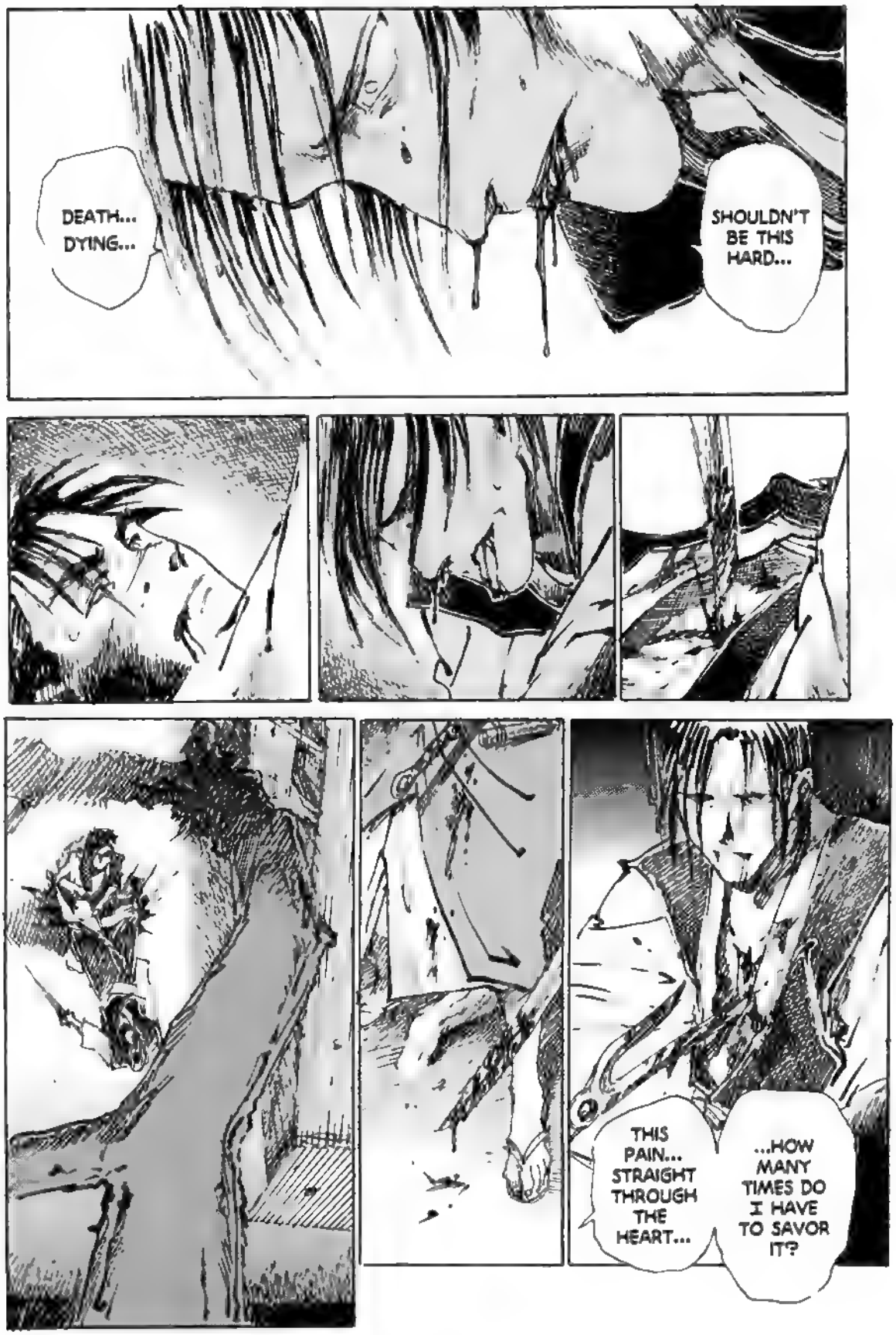
IF WE'RE BOTH IMMORTAL...
...IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT TO KILL YOU TOO EASY.
JUST WHAT I WAS THINKING.
ARE YOU READY, SHIZUMA?
I'VE GOT SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR YOU-- A TASTE OF PAIN...
...SUCH AS MOST PEOPLE COULD NEVER EVEN DREAM OF!
AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.
DRAW!

SHARK
WAAH!


THANK GOD...
I'M SORRY, LITTLE ONE.
.....
.....
I'LL GIVE HER A PROPER BURIAL LATER.



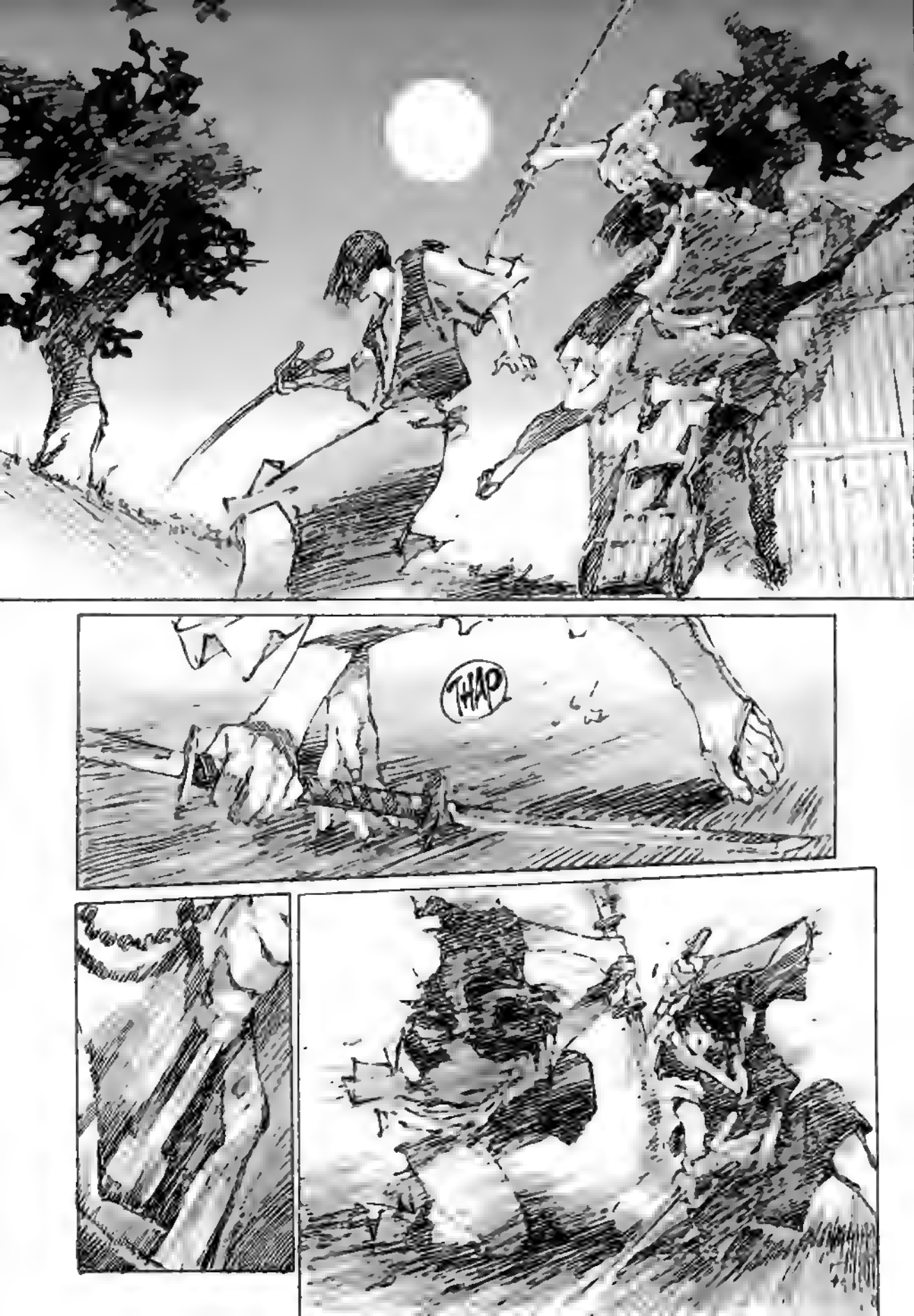
FWAP
THAT WASN'T SWORDSMAN-SHIP...
IT WASN'T EVEN MURDER!


DEATH... DYING...
SHOULDN'T BE THIS HARD...
THIS PAIN... STRAIGHT THROUGH THE HEART...
...HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SAVOR IT?

I GUESS ALL YOU AND I HAVE IN COMMON...
...IS THE PAIN-- EH, SHIZUMA?
hahh
haff
POK
IF WE CAN'T REACH SOME KIND OF CONCILIATION...
SLSSHH
...THEN AS FAR AS THE ITTŌ-RYŪ IS CONCERNED, YOU'RE JUST A THREAT.
AND SO...

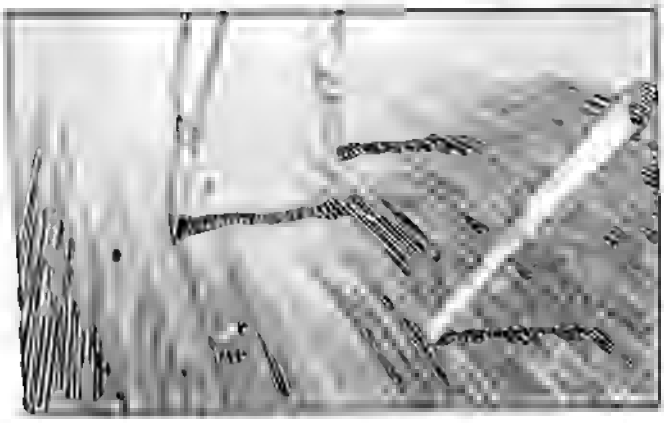
THE NIGHT IS ALMOST OVER.
FROM HERE ON OUT...
...I EXPECT YOU TO BET YOUR LIFE.
SNAK
BET MY LIFE, EH...?
HOW VERY HUMAN.

I'LL GIVE YOU ONE LAST CHANCE--
--TO CHANGE YOUR MIND.
WHEN A SAMURAI GIVES HIS WORD, HE STANDS BY IT.
OR THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY, AIN'T IT, PAL?


THAP

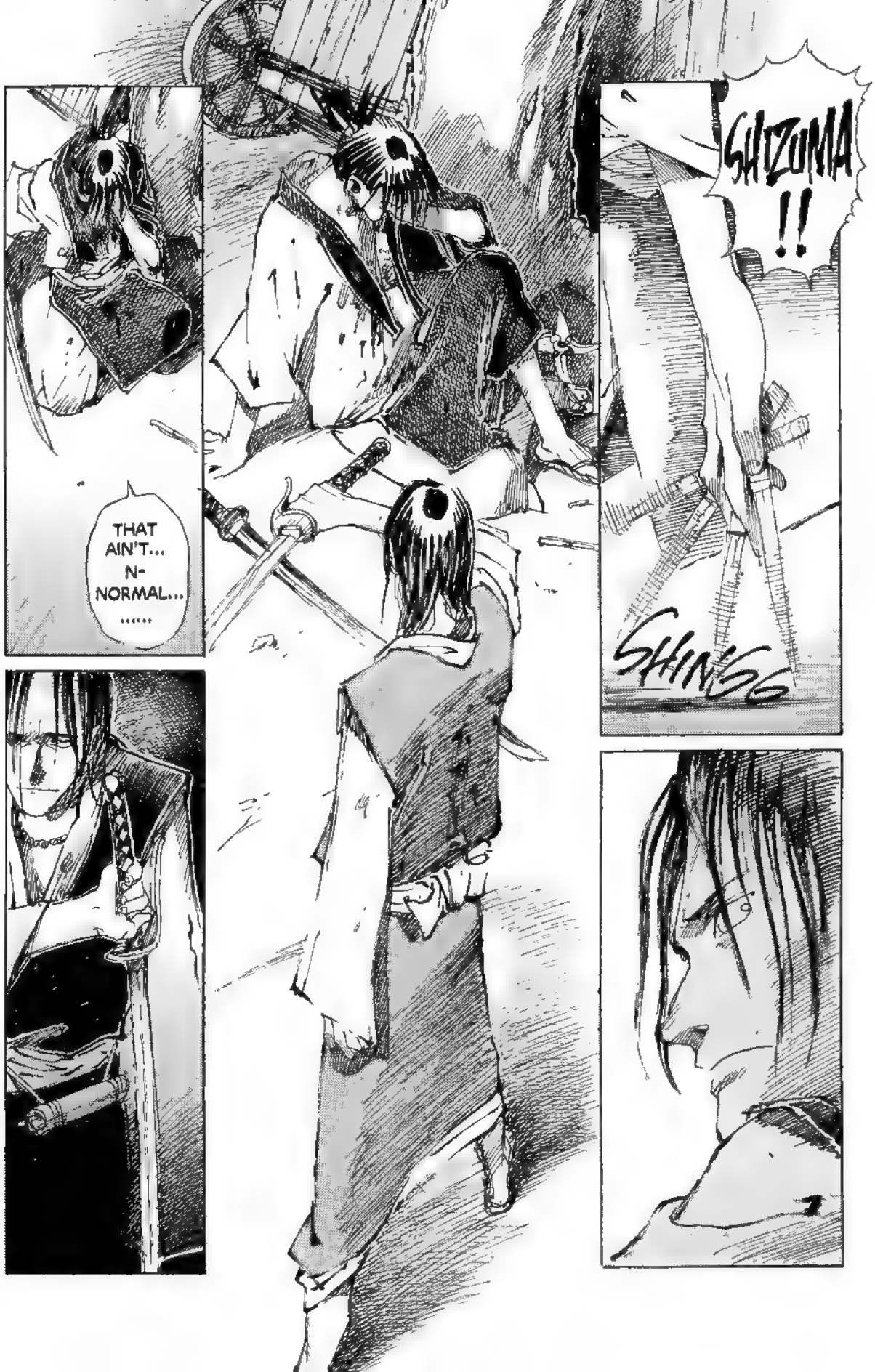
KCHUK!
WHA--?
VVHRRRRRR

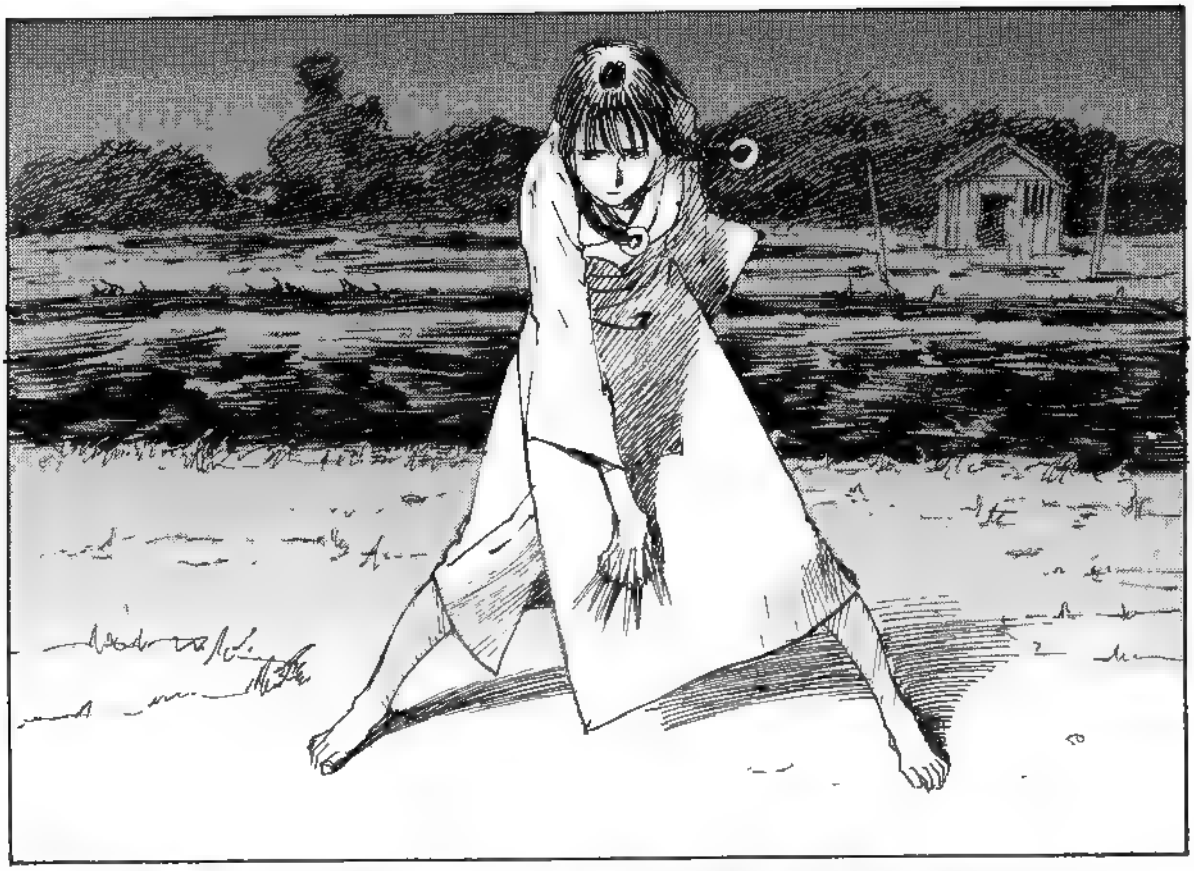
TANG TANG
KTANG



THAP

SWING THROUGH & HIT 3 TARGETS
FWMP
BECAUSE YOU LUST FOR HER KNIVES?

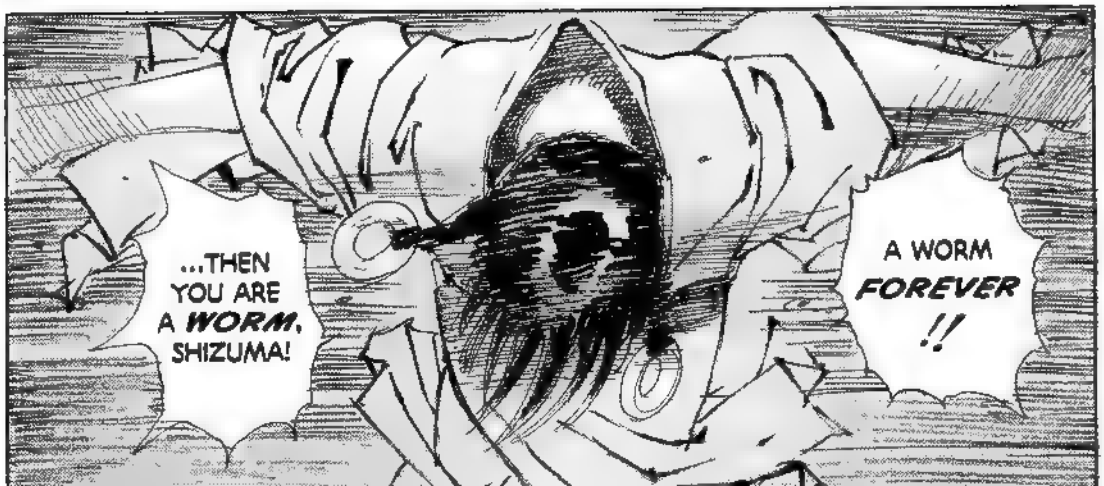

THAT AIN'T... N- NORMAL... .....
SHIZUMA !!
SHING



.....
.....
GIRL, EVEN IF EVERY ONE IS A FATAL STRIKE, THEY WON'T HURT ME.

SHIZU-MA...
PLEASE... JUST *DIE*.

IF YOU'VE LIVED TWO HUNDRED YEARS... AND IN ALL THOSE YEARS...
...YOU'VE NEVER BEEN A LEADER...


...THEN YOU ARE A *WORM*, SHIZUMA!
A WORM *FOREVER* !!

CURTAIN OF DEATH!
FLIGHT OF THE GOLDEN WASPS!!

TUCK
THOK
可可可!
可可

DAMN!

SHIT!
WHERE'D HE--?!

I'M TAKING YOU APART, OLD MAN!

CHOK
CHOK
CHOK
CHOK

MANJI!!
YOU ALWAYS GO TOO FAR. YOU--!!
ARE YOU OKAY?
PLEASE NO SHOUTING IT HURTS MY HEAD.

THE POISON'S STILL IN YOUR SYSTEM!
YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE STILL ISN'T BACK TO NORMAL...
HERE, TAKE THIS!
IS THAT IT...?
MY HEAD... SPINNING...
Uhhnnn
UHNNG.
HEH...
HUGK!
HEH HEH

HEH... BEHOLD!
SEE WHAT THE KESSEN-CHU CAN DO...
MANJI... SAME BODY— YOUR FLESH...
MY FLESH, THE SAME.
WHILE I CAN... STILL SPEAK... ONE...ONE THING!
I TELL YOU... GIRL!

KAGEHISA... ANOTSU... IN TWO WEEKS... HE TRAVELS TO KAGA.
....
...?
THAT'S ALL... ALL I GOT... SAY...
NOT SO FAST, SHIZUMA! BEFORE YOU SLEEP...
...TELL ME ONE THING...
WHY?! I NOTICED, PAL-- YOU SAW ME COMING DOWN ON YOU, JUST A SECOND EARLY.
BUT YOU DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO BLOCK ME. WHY?!
HEH... GIRL...
IT'S TRUE... WHAT YOU SAID. YOUR WORDS...
IT'S TRUE...
LIVING LIKE... LIKE A WORM...

ONE
TIRES...
OF
IT...

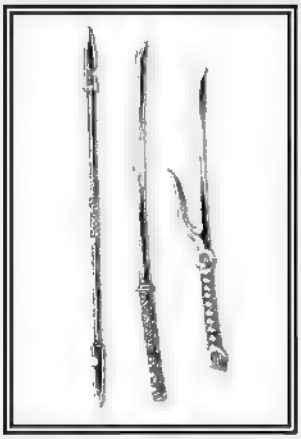
THERE... YOU THINK THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH?
RIN...
I GOTTA ASK-- WHY'D YOU BOTHER TO BURY THAT BASTARD?
MM... I DON'T KNOW. SOME SORTA... RESPECT, MAYBE?
FOR ALL THOSE YEARS OF LIFE...?

BUT IN THE END... IT WASN'T TRUE.
WHEN I WAS IN THE HUT... ALONE WITH HIM...
...HE SAID HE COULD GIVE ME ETERNAL LIFE.
YOU KNOW...
"BUT YOU KNOW WHAT? WHEN HE SAID THAT...
"...I FELT SUCH HORROR."
BUT IF I REALLY WAS IMMORTAL... THEN STUFF LIKE REVENGE...
...ALL KINDS OF THINGS... THEY'D ALL BE SO EASY.

NEVER DYING MEANS ALWAYS HAVING TO LIVE, NO MATTER WHAT THE PAIN OF EXISTENCE.
WHO ON EARTH WOULD WANT THAT... WHO...?
....
RIN...
LOOKS LIKE THAT BABY'S GONNA FALL INTO THE WATER.
EEK!
WHY WERE YOU JUST STANDING THERE LIKE A BIG GOOF?!

UMM... MANJI...?
YEAH? WHAT?
DYING WITHOUT ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS...
...OR LIVING ON FOR YEARS AND REALIZING YOU WILL NEVER ACHIEVE THEM--WHICH IS WORSE?
HELL... NO WAY TO KNOW, UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD.

GLOSSARY



daimyō: Ruler of a feudal fiefdom.

dōjō: Training centers. Here, centers for swordsmanship.

doseimotsukō, rengyō: These plants (Dutchman's pipe and forsythia) can alleviate some types of poisoning when boiled and consumed.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Ezo: Hokkaido and the other islands north of Japan. At the time of this story, they were still controlled by the indigenous Ainu peoples and were a perilous back door into closed Japan for foreign goods and people.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword tradition led by Anotsu.

kenshi: A swordsman, not necessarily born into the samurai caste.

kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die, but feels pain like a mortal.

kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer."

Magatsu: A ronin with Rin's enemy, Anotsu.

Muromachi: The reign of the Ashikaga shoguns in Kyoto, AD 1338–1573. The last period of social stability in Japan before two centuries of civil war and the rise of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword tradition taught by Rin's father.

ryō: A high-value gold coin.

sankin: An official trip to the capital. Daimyō of outlying fiefdoms were required to spend one year in three in Edo, allowing the shogun to keep them under tight control.

sakura-mochi: A delicacy made from pounded sweet rice paste and cherry-tree leaves.

Sanzu no Kawa: "River of the Dead." Analogous to the River Styx in Greek mythology. Crossed by the dead on their way to the underworld.

satori: The state of intuitive illumination sought by followers of Zen Buddhism; the movement of such enlightenment.

Toyotomi: Toyotomi Hideyoshi, AD 1536–1598, the first warlord to unify Japan. After he died of an illness, his empire collapsed and his son and heir was killed by the Tokugawa family, who rule Japan at the time of our story.

Uji: An area near Kyoto.

warabi: An edible plant (bracken or fernbrake).

COVER GALLERY

The following are Hiroaki Samura's covers from issues eight, seven, ten, and eleven of the *Blade of the Immortal* comics series. Issues nine through eleven of *Blade of the Immortal* also included pinups by many of the industry's finest artists. We chose to feature those of Gene Ha and Gary Gianni.

pinup by Gene Ha

pinup by Gary Gianni

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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

The curse of the bloodworm is what keeps Manji alive—slit his throat or stab him in the heart, and those mystical worms will force his body to heal. This curse of immortality will not be lifted until Manji has killed one thousand evil men. But when he is bested in battle—when he strikes a killing blow that fails to kill—he realizes there is another who cannot die, one who rejoices in his ability to survive any fight. One who is willing to spend his eternity sending good people to early graves.

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